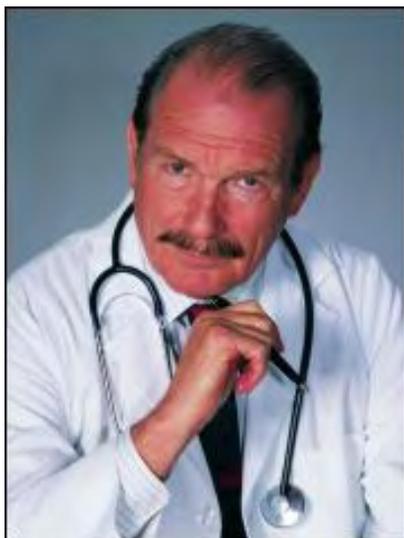


# ComputerEdge™ Online — 10/29/10



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Do you really need antivirus software? Plus, if you do need it, what's free?

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One Man's Junk E-Mail May Actually Be Legit

Whenever you are waiting for an e-mail that just doesn't want to arrive, check your Junk or Deleted Items folders. There may be some reason why the message was misdirected.



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### [Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers](#) by ComputerEdge Staff

Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns.

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## Digital Dave

“Digital Dave answers your tech questions.” by *Digital Dave*

A reader is experiencing folder-management problems after an OS reload; the Microsoft Trackball Optical 1.0 was retired before its time; a reader's laptop goes to sleep but doesn't wake up.

*Dear Digital Dave,*

*When I try to create a new folder, nothing appears to change on the display. If I go up a folder and back again, the new folder appears in alphabetical order under "new folder." In the effort to give it a name, after typing the name and pressing Return, the "new folder" remains unchanged, highlighted, until I transfer up a folder and back again. Then the new name is located alphabetically correct. When I want to delete a folder, after pressing Return, the folder is highlighted but does not go away, until going up and down to the same folder, and then it is gone.*

*This was happening before a virus attack and the Windows XP operating system was replaced. After getting the Windows software reloaded, operation was correct for a week, but now it is incorrect again. My local service shop couldn't help, and an Iyoji Indian service company could not help either.*

*Time to get a Mac?*

*Orville Lynner  
Calhan, Colorado*

Dear Orville,

There is a logical reason for what your computer is doing; we just don't know what it is.

Sounds like it's just not refreshing the view after the change. It's certainly not malware. I think, perhaps, one of your applications is causing the problem, since it was persistent after a Windows reinstall.

Since you know exactly how it works, it seems trivial to work around it. It sounds like you could just press F5 (refresh) after changing a folder name and you'd be fine if nothing else about your system is bothering you.

Since the problem returned after you did a clean install, I would guess that it's related to updates that occurred after the initial install—either to the operating system or hardware drivers. Not likely to be malware. This is an issue that I haven't seen before. If anyone else has dealt with this and solved the problem, please leave a comment.

One thing that I will note is that the vast majority of Windows questions that I receive now are for problems with Windows XP. I don't know if that relates to hardware getting older or flaws built into the operating system. Since the only XP machine I now have is a virtual machine, it is difficult for me to test the unique problems. As time goes on, there will be more problems and less places to find answers.

As for whether it is time to get a Mac, that depends upon whether you have much software that is dependent upon Windows and how quickly you will adjust to the slightly different way things are done on a Mac. While you can run Windows software in a virtual machine on a Mac, that adds a level of software that, if you don't need a Mac, isn't necessary.

As much as some people rave about Macs, they don't actually do much (if anything) that can't be done on a Windows computer. Windows 7 has come a long way from the Windows Vista disaster. From a learning point of view, you will probably find it easier to migrate to Windows 7 than the Mac operating system. Plus, it will probably be a little less expensive.

I'm definitely not saying that a Windows computer is any better than the Apple Macintosh. Both are capable machines and have had their problems from time to time. In this age of Internet applications, most people will never experience much difference between the two.

Digital Dave

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*Dear Digital Dave,*

*I've used many mice over the years and have settled in comfortably with the Microsoft Trackball Optical 1.0. This is the best trackball I have found. In fact, I bought two of them. But since then, one has died and I worry about my last one. I've tried to find replacements, but can't seem to locate any. I don't understand why this item isn't being manufactured anymore or copied. Logitech has a "similar" one, but it doesn't perform as well. Is there a place to go to find this kind of high-quality yesterday product or knock-off versions? Thanks for your time. Been reading your column in paper and on the Net for years.*

*Mark  
San Diego*

Dear Mark,

I wasn't previously aware of it, but there are many people who have your same concerns. The Microsoft Trackball Optical 1.0 is extremely popular especially with some gamers. I didn't find anything out there that users felt were comparable.

Apparently, Microsoft was marketing the trackball in the general market at a relatively low price. They were losing money on each sale, so they discontinued the device. However, there is a rumor that due to popular demand Microsoft may reintroduce a similar trackball in the near future. This time I would expect the price to be a little higher.

For now, you can still get new, or almost new, Microsoft Trackball Optical 1.0s at eBay ([shop.ebay.com/i.html?\\_kw=trackball&\\_kw=optical&\\_kw=1.0](http://shop.ebay.com/i.html?_kw=trackball&_kw=optical&_kw=1.0)). There continues to be a market for the many people who still rave about its qualities.

Digital Dave

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*Dear Digital Dave,*

*Thanks for all the years of great info. I have a new Compaq CQ61 laptop and have an annoying problem. When my computer goes to sleep, it won't wake up 90 percent of the time. I have to power down and restart. The other 10 percent it will fully wake up, but only after 20 to 30 minutes. Until then it is frozen.*

*I have called Compaq and they had me try some things and could not figure it out. I have systematically*

*disabled everything in the Start menu via msconfig and still had the problem. This has been like this since day one. I have installed all the latest drivers for the entire computer hardware and updated all my programs. I am trying to avoid sending the laptop back to Compaq, because I really don't want to be without it forever (based on previous experiences).*

*Thank you for your insight.*

*Dale Mills  
Crossville, Tennessee*

Dear Dale,

I think that the Sleep and Hibernate features on laptop computers are a couple of the biggest failings of Windows—and they are not necessarily unrelated. I don't know if it is an inherent problem in Windows or associated with particular hardware—although it is likely to be both. When either of these features is executed, commands are sent to the hardware to perform certain screen, hard drive and memory activities. If there is not complete consistency between the commands and the hardware capabilities, then a glitch may occur that will prevent the wake-up command from being recognized or even seen at all.

On many Windows computers, Sleep and Hibernate may work fine 99 percent of the time. Yet even then there are occasions when the computer will freeze and need rebooting. On some computers—Compaq being one of the brands that seems to commonly have had the problem—it is rare when you can wake up the machine. I think that you are right not to send your computer back for repairs, because it is unlikely that the problem will be ultimately fixed.

It is not a satisfying solution, but I never use either Sleep or Hibernate with any of my Windows computers for exactly the reasons stated in your question. I will use a screen saver if I need to leave my computer running. I would recommend that you change your Power Option to never Sleep or Hibernate. Power down your computer if you will not need it for a long period of time.

Many people may not like this answer, but I've found that it is often easier to circumvent a problem feature than to waste too much time trying to get it to work properly—if it is even possible.

Ideas from others are welcome.

Digital Dave

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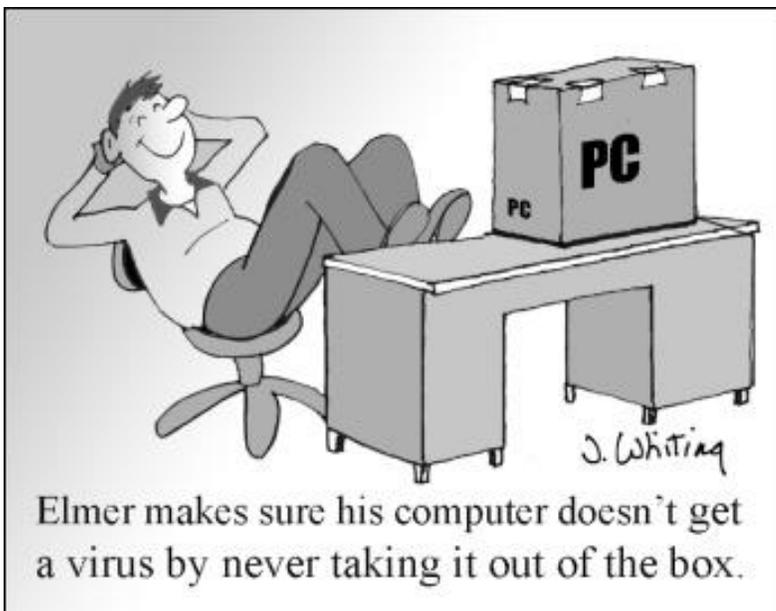


## Antivirus Programs' Downsides

“Some antivirus programs can cause as much grief as a virus.” by Michael J. Ross

When deciding whether an individual antivirus program or a full security suite is a wise addition to your overall strategy for protecting your computer, bear in mind that the cure is sometimes worse than the disease.

In the movie *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines*, the humans realize too late that Skynet, the powerful defense network that at one point they thought was protecting them against a cyber attacker, actually turned out to be the enemy. You may feel the same way if you have ever been called upon to fix someone's PC that is running terribly slow—only to discover that the security software that is supposed to be protecting it and helping the user is causing the operating system to run at such a slow pace that the security software is unable to remove any malware.



This is not a theoretical scenario dreamed up by Hollywood scriptwriters, because I personally have worked on a couple of machines that were so bogged down by antivirus software and other security utilities that the computer was effectively unusable, and none of the offending programs could be uninstalled. In these cases, the best solution turned out to be the "nuclear option," i.e., wipe the hard drive and reinstall the operating system. But this has the obvious downside of losing any user data that has not been backed up (which sadly is the case with far too many users' data)—assuming that it is an older PC that does not allow you to boot off of a "live CD" and copy the data to a USB flash drive, or that the user has done such a

horrendous job of organizing his data on the hard drive that it cannot be located manually, without running the original applications.

Antivirus product vendors make all sorts of claims as to the effectiveness and safety of their products—claims that oftentimes turn out to be false and misleading. In this article, we will examine some of the issues that get almost no coverage in the press—especially the press that accepts advertising from software vendors. The term "anti-irus software" will be used in the more general sense, referring to any computer program designed to battle viruses, Trojan horses and worms—but not those programs dedicated to fighting spyware. Our focus will be on software that runs under Microsoft Windows; but many of the principles apply equally well to PCs running Linux and Mac OS X.

Proponents of Windows may argue that it is unfair to focus on their favorite operating system, and that Linux and OS X have seen their share of security problems. But critics of Microsoft Windows can point to a history of lousy security, as well as several major weaknesses in the operating system's design. For instance, Windows allows any program to alter key components of the operating system: the Registry, the auto-run files (which start automatically when Windows itself starts), and the executable programs at the core of the system. After all, what kind of system would invite unvetted applications to modify a critical part of the system—in this case, the Registry—during an unavoidable step, namely, installing the applications?!

## So-Called Solutions

To say that the history of antivirus software is checkered may be a bit generous. When this type of software was emerging on the computer scene—in the late 1980s—the viruses were relatively primitive compared to those of today, making it much easier for security software to detect and report the viruses, regardless of whether a virus was embedded in an executable program or hidden in the master boot record (MBR) of a hard drive or diskette. Yet the virus authors quickly learned better techniques for cloaking their clever code so as to better evade detection by all the leading antivirus checkers. At the same time, those wishing to spread viruses also made progress via "social engineering," which in this realm means crafting spam and later Web pages to increase the odds that unsuspecting Internet users will download virus-infected programs to their computers.

As the years went by, security software manufacturers devoted greater resources to improving their products and the databases of virus signatures upon which they relied. But virus authors were always one step ahead, and apparently gaining ground all the time, as they developed "polymorphic viruses," which are designed to be shape-shifting so that their own digital signatures no longer match their virtual "mug shots" in the vendors' databases.

Those vendors certainly had more resources to throw at the problem. So how well did they do? Several years ago, a manager at the Australian Computer Emergency Response Team (AusCERT) stated ([www.zdnet.com.au/eighty-percent-of-new-malware-defeats-antivirus-139263949.htm](http://www.zdnet.com.au/eighty-percent-of-new-malware-defeats-antivirus-139263949.htm)) that an astounding 80 percent of malware is not even detected by antivirus programs, let alone eradicated. In other words, popular desktop antivirus applications "don't work." One needs to seriously question the value of any antivirus product that catches less than 20 percent of the malicious code—certainly deserving of a failing grade.

Did the security software companies accept those embarrassing results as a challenge to redouble their efforts and improve their offerings? Apparently not, given that one year later an industry observer, Virus Bulletin, was sharply criticizing ([tech.blorge.com/Structure:%20/2007/02/06/microsofts-vista-anti-virus-solution-slammed/](http://tech.blorge.com/Structure:%20/2007/02/06/microsofts-vista-anti-virus-solution-slammed/)) some of the major players—Microsoft, McAfee, Norton, and G DATA Software—for not "having their products right by now." John Hawes, a technical consultant at Virus Bulletin, even noted that "I had my head in my hands when I saw how poorly tailored some of the products were." If some of the leading products can do that to a security expert, one can only imagine the frustration felt by the

average computer user when her chosen antivirus program seems to cause as much grief as a virus.

While the vendors should be praised for spending the money to bolster their antivirus programs, they should not win praise for the misleading ads that some commentators could only characterize as scaremongering—ads that featured all sorts of scary statistics as to the number of virus variants loose in the wild, and the damage they could do to your computer. Such marketing efforts invariably failed to admit that the typical user's risk of infection was far less than the ads might suggest, and that the majority of the viruses would never be seen on any but the most backwater Web sites, none of which the average user would stumble upon or even hear about.

## Hypocritical Oaths

Doctors take a vow that they will "do no harm"—part of the Hippocratic Oath. If only the same were true for security software manufacturers. While a computer user may spend \$75 or less for a security suite that may turn out to do no good whatsoever, that direct financial loss could be the least of the damage, considering that anyone with enough wherewithal to own a computer would certainly value her time—time that is wasted when she must wait for a resource-sucking program to connect to the vendor's server, check for the latest virus signatures, prompt to download and install them, perform said operations, and then begin scanning. Some of the more bossy of these applications don't bother to even give the user a chance to decide whether or not to do a full system scan, but launch into one anyway, effectively locking up the machine for hours. A cynic could joke that consuming 100 percent of the CPU is the only way that some of these programs can be effective, by preventing the user from downloading virus-infected files or doing anything else on the computer!

Even worse, some of the products conflict with other applications, making your system unstable, and even cause file corruption or outright deletion. For instance, in March 2006, McAfee released an update to its antivirus product that caused widespread damage for countless users by generating false positives for non-infected files in all sorts of applications, including Microsoft Office. One site alone lost tens of thousands of files on approximately 2,000 machines. The fiasco was enough to prompt people to comment that they needed antivirus protection from their antivirus protection!

Twelve months later, users of the security service Live OneCare (from Microsoft, always a reliable source of security snafus) learned the hard way that when OneCare detected a virus in one of the e-mail messages in Outlook or Outlook Express, instead of simply deleting or quarantining the individual message, OneCare would delete the entire e-mail folder containing the virus. How's that for a nuclear option? By the way, OneCare came in last place ([www.pcworld.com/article/129521/microsoft\\_onecare\\_last\\_in\\_antivirus\\_tests.html](http://www.pcworld.com/article/129521/microsoft_onecare_last_in_antivirus_tests.html)) when tested against 16 other antivirus products.

But of all the antivirus options on the market, perhaps the most disparaged and despised is Norton AntiVirus, now owned by Symantec. In the eyes of a legion of angry users, Norton has usually been the worst offender in terms of consuming system memory and processing power. It nags the poor user with alarming pop-up messages exhorting him to purchase the product after the trial period has passed. It can cause system crashes when not properly uninstalled or when hit by a virus on a non-XP system. It tends to be the priciest of the options, and yet the virus definitions are behind those of the competition. Even when it finds a virus, its quarantine process can be of little value. Internet gaming enthusiasts are annoyed when it blocks needed ports. Lastly, it is oftentimes forced upon people who have purchased PCs from Compaq and other hardware companies that bundle it onto their new PCs—in other words, replicating without people's knowledge—like a virus.

## Thinking Outside the Computer Box

Given the raft of problems that can be caused by even some of the most heralded security programs out there, it can make the average computer owner wonder, "With friends like that, who needs enemies?"

Fortunately, it is possible to use a computer every day, visiting innumerable Web sites, and downloading and installing software, without running any antivirus programs, and yet never encountering a computer virus or any other instance of malware—and I speak from experience.

Fully understanding a problem usually takes you at least halfway to the solution. So first consider the sources of the viruses, worms and other malware. A couple of decades ago, the primary vector of infection was the ubiquitous diskette, which was produced in the untold millions, and frequently used to transfer data files and executable programs from one computer to another. (This was the era before the Internet and e-mail.) Nowadays, your Internet connection is the only way that tainted software could land on your hard drive, assuming that you do not load a CD that was created by an individual and contains executable programs. Consequently, if you use a safe Web browser (i.e., anything other than Internet Explorer), avoid questionable Web sites, load only factory-made CDs, and never download any executable files except from the most trusted of shareware sites and vendors, then you probably will never need to scan your system for viruses. (Also, be sure to make diligent use of a firewall for blocking inbound attacks and outbound spyware communications.)

So when deciding whether an individual antivirus program, or a full security suite is a wise addition to your overall strategy for protecting your computer, bear in mind that the cure is sometimes worse than the disease.

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Michael J. Ross is a Web developer ([www.ross.ws](http://www.ross.ws)), writer, and freelance editor. He creates Web sites that help entrepreneurs turn their ideas into profitable online businesses.

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## Antivirus: Why Buy When It's Free?

“The best free antivirus programs around.” by Pete Choppin

Antivirus software is like insurance: a necessary evil from which you will rarely see a return on investment. But there's no need to pirate antivirus software. For home users, the free stuff is perfectly good.

I'm so tired of paying high prices for antivirus software. OK, I don't actually pay for my software. And no, Digital Dave, I don't pirate it either. There's no need to pirate antivirus software. For home users, the free stuff is perfectly good.

I think of antivirus software like I think of insurance: an absolutely necessary evil from which you will rarely see a return on investment. But note I said absolutely necessary, because just like your insurance policy, antivirus software *may* protect you from that one devastating disaster.

I used to run my systems with no antivirus software at all. And, rightfully so, I received criticism about not installing antivirus protection. My naïve argument was, of course, all about smart browsing. "Just be careful and you'll be fine" was my rationale. But for the most part, it's true ... until you realize your computer has lost its data, that totally cool desktop wallpaper, as well as its marbles. And right about when you're well into the Windows Setup program rebuilding your system, you find yourself saying, "Why didn't I just install antivirus software?"

So my argument isn't whether to get antivirus software, but whether you should pay for it.

In no particular order, here are the best free antivirus programs I've found. Take a look at all the features; see if you like the interface and functionality, kick the tires—but do yourself a favor and install one of these.

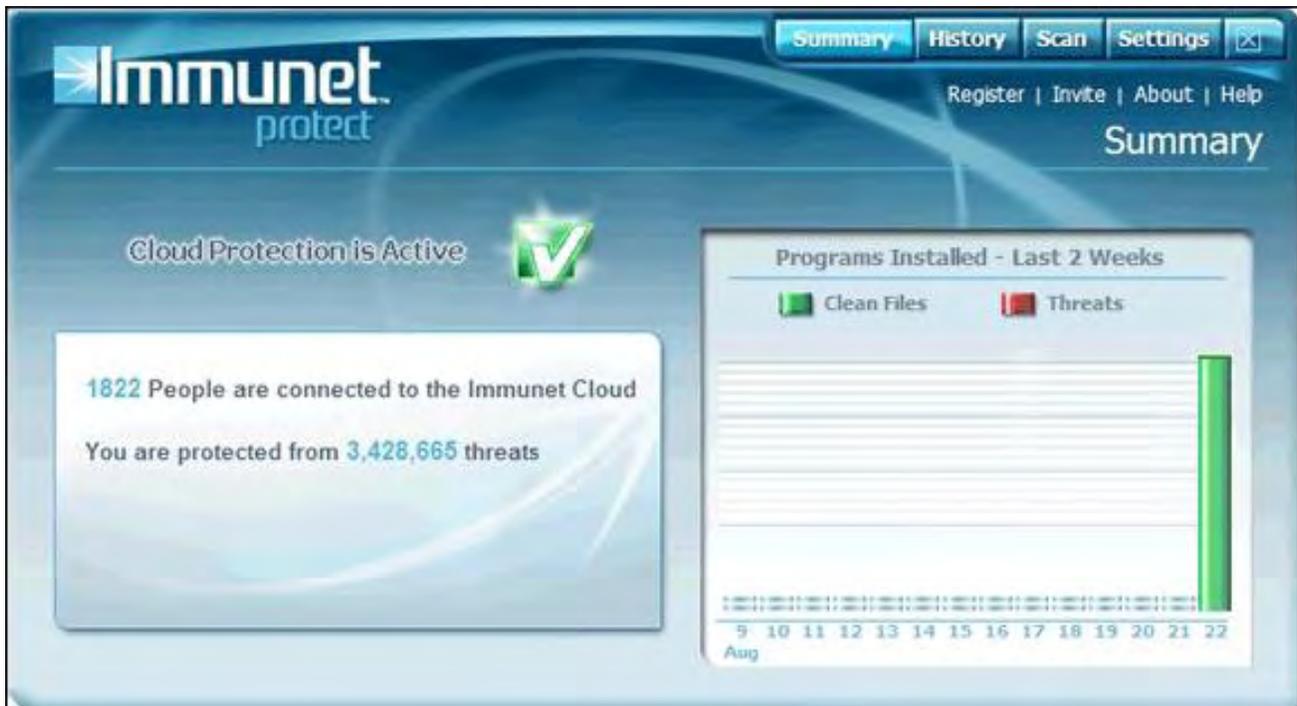
Panda Cloud Antivirus ([www.cloudantivirus.com/en/](http://www.cloudantivirus.com/en/))



Have you heard of cloud computing? Check out Panda Cloud Antivirus. It's free and uses cloud computing technology to protect against the newest malware variants without impacting PC performance. Meanwhile, Panda Cloud Antivirus works well with other desktop antivirus software simultaneously to provide multitier security protection for your computer.

With the cloud-based scanning from PandaLabs ([www.pandasecurity.com/usa/](http://www.pandasecurity.com/usa/)) servers, they've got the virus scanning time to six minutes, thus becoming the lightest and fastest antivirus service. It supports Windows 7, Vista and XP (32-bit) operating systems. The latest Panda Cloud Antivirus version is 1.0.

Immunet Protect ([www.immunet.com/main/index3.html](http://www.immunet.com/main/index3.html))



Immunet Protect is another free cloud-based antivirus program that takes advantage not only of cloud computing but community-based protection, collective wisdom and malware protection on your computer.

Immunet Protect consumes a very small amount of computer resources while running, and it can run on Microsoft Windows XP (SP2 or later), Vista and Windows 7 (RC 32-bit only).

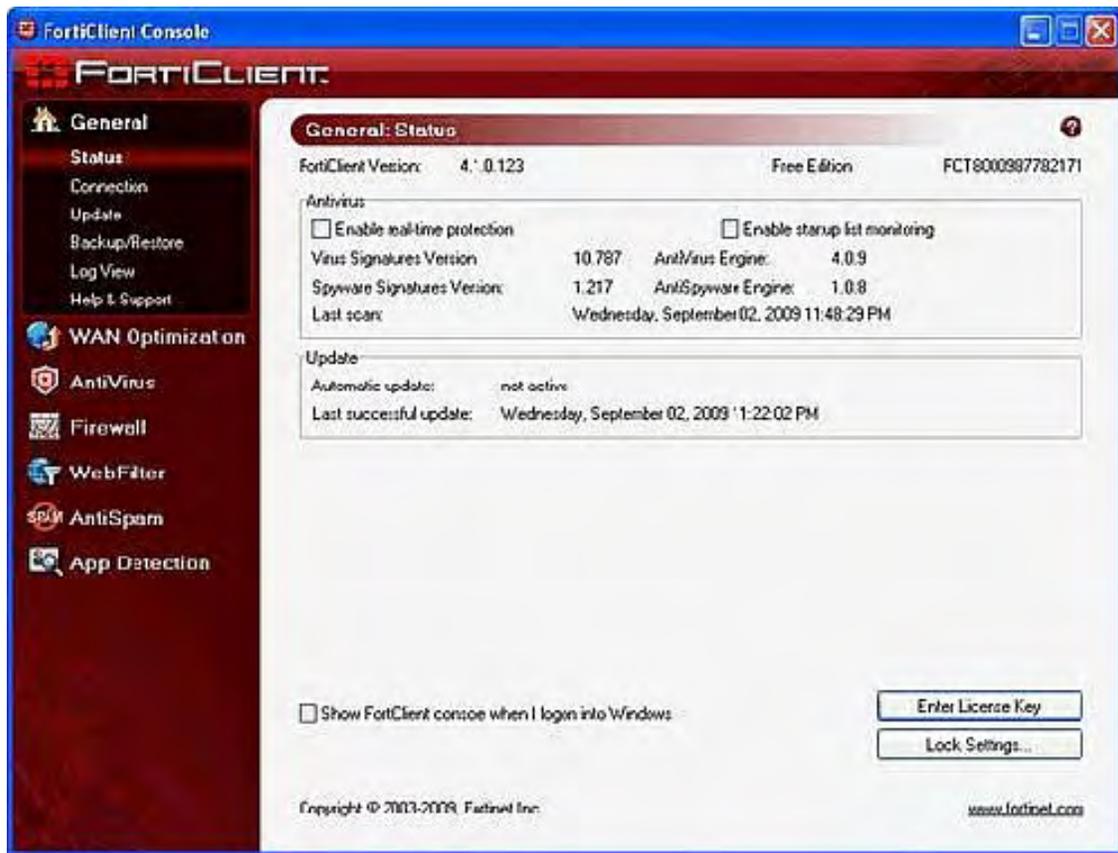
AVG 9 Antivirus Free Edition ([www.avg.com/us-en/free-antivirus](http://www.avg.com/us-en/free-antivirus))



AVG 9 Antivirus software is a significant improvement from its predecessors in speed and levels of security protection. It features an antivirus module, spyware module, basic anti-rootkit protection, e-mail and phishing protection, as well as the AVG Link scanner to provide safety ratings for Web sites.

AVG Antivirus 9 free edition's download size is around 70MB. It's a lightweight, low-impact package, yet comes with tons of features.

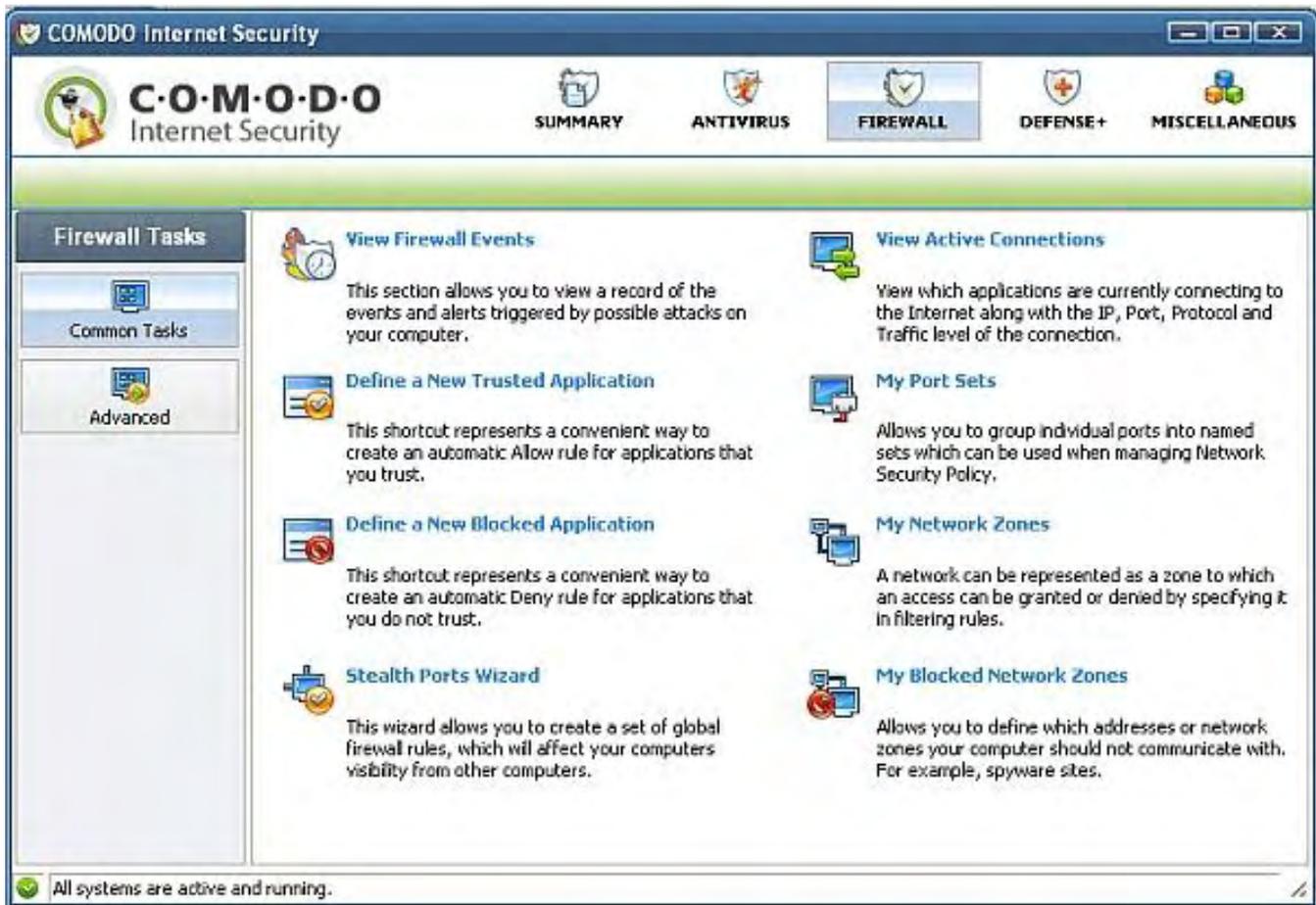
FortiClient EndPoint Security Suite ([download.cnet.com/FortiClient-Endpoint-Security-Standard-Edition/3000-2239\\_4-10519418.html?tag=mnco](http://download.cnet.com/FortiClient-Endpoint-Security-Standard-Edition/3000-2239_4-10519418.html?tag=mnco))



FortiClient Endpoint Security software provides an SSL/IPSec VPN, WAN optimization client, anti-virus and anti-spyware, anti rootkit protection, execution behavioral analysis, firewall and intrusion prevention.

FortiClient Endpoint Security free edition also provides automatic updates from the FortiGuard subscription service to ensure protection against the latest threats.

Comodo Internet Security—Free Windows Internet Security Suite ([personalfirewall.comodo.com/](http://personalfirewall.comodo.com/))



Comodo Internet Security comes with Comodo AntiVirus and Comodo Firewall to eliminate all known viruses, worms and Trojans from desktops and networks with no license fees or hidden costs. The free Windows Internet Security is free for life.

Comodo Internet Security 3.13 (paid) includes many new features and services, including Comodo Secure DNS, Comodo HopSurf and the ability to specify alternative URLs for program and virus updates.

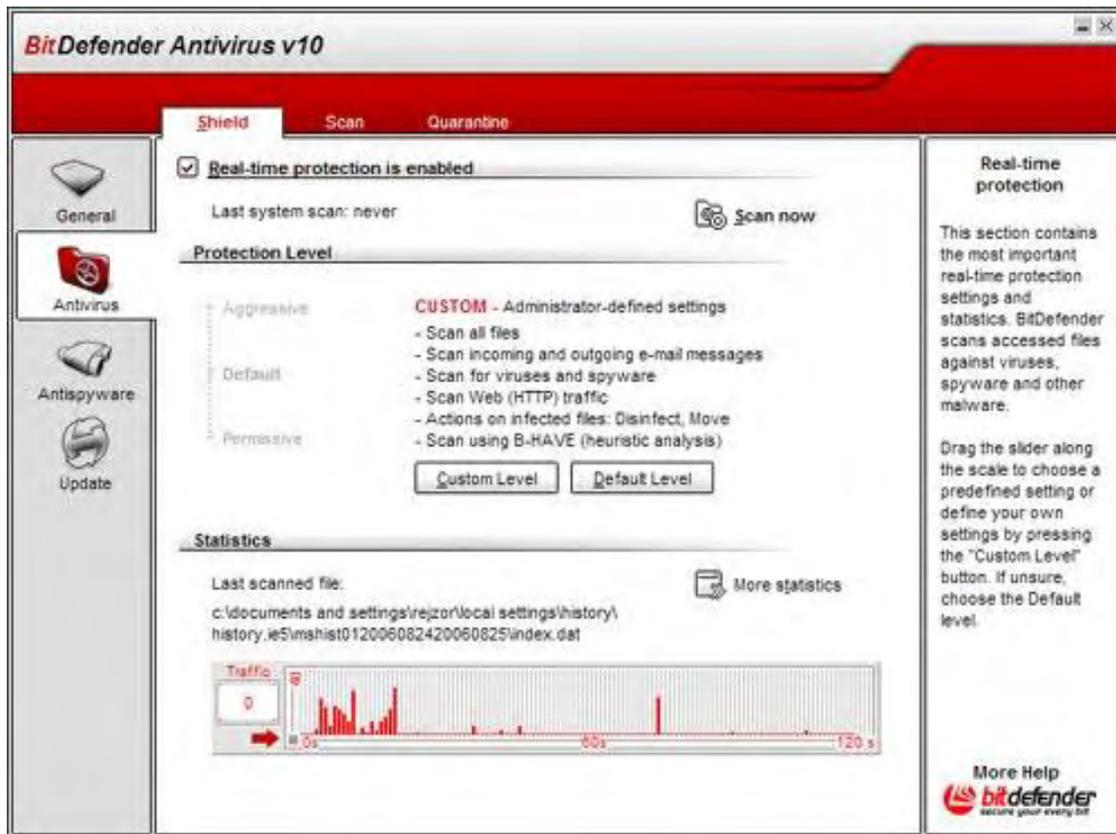
Avira Antivir 9 Free Edition ([www.avira.com/en/avira-free-antivirus](http://www.avira.com/en/avira-free-antivirus))



Avira Antivir 9 doesn't appear to have changed much compared to the previous free edition. The most important changes on Avira are: locked file scanning (scans files in use), faster scanning for multicore processors, much improved disinfection and, most importantly, the added adware/spyware detection in the *free* version.

It still remains a good free antivirus program to use for protecting your Windows system.

BitDefender 10 Antivirus Free Edition ([www.bitdefender.com/PRODUCT-14-en—BitDefender-Free-Edition.html](http://www.bitdefender.com/PRODUCT-14-en—BitDefender-Free-Edition.html))



BitDefender 10 antivirus free edition is equipped with latest BitDefender antivirus engine. The best part of this free antivirus is the ICSA Labs-certified scanning engines found in other BitDefender products, which allow you to enjoy basic virus protection for no cost at all.

However, BitDefender Free Edition is an on-demand virus scanner, which is best used in a system-recovery or forensics role.

Avast 5 Free Antivirus ([www.avast.com/free-antivirus-download](http://www.avast.com/free-antivirus-download))

The biggest changes in Avast 5 free antivirus are the new user interface plus improvements on the antivirus scanning engine, performance and memory, and disk and CPU usage.



This free antivirus comes fully load with security system-protection features for your computer. The most impressive security feature is the multithreaded scanning optimization, which allows the splitting of large individual files between cores, accelerating the scanning process.

Just like insurance, antivirus software protects both you and other computers with which you come in contact. And there are several free options out there. I just hope the government doesn't end up mandating it like car insurance.

Let me know what *your* favorite antivirus software is.

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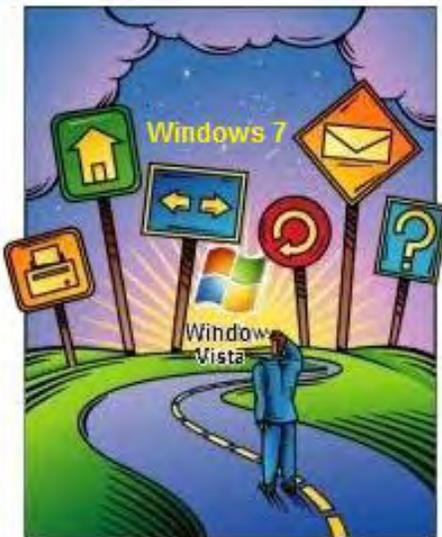
Pete Choppin has been an IT Professional for over 15 years. He currently works as a network and systems administrator for a company called Albion based in Clearfield, Utah. He has experience in all types of hardware, software, and networking technologies. He is proficient in many operating systems including Linux, Windows and Macintosh. His interests include cooking, sci-fi, computers and technology, and Web design—a semi-professional endeavor, having designed Web sites in the dental field, e-commerce businesses, and for the Boy Scouts of America.

Pete has been a devout reader of *ComputerEdge* since 1990 and contributes regularly to featured articles as well as the Linux Lessons section of *ComputerEdge*. He can be contacted at [pchoppin@comcast.net](mailto:pchoppin@comcast.net) but prefers to have comments on *ComputerEdge* articles submitted to the editor and posted for the benefit of all readers.

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# Windows Tips and Tricks

## Windows 7 Tips and Tricks

“De-Cluttering Your Windows Desktop” by Jack Dunning

Windows 7 offers some tricks and key combinations to help you keep your desktop and working space free of clutter—and go back again.

If you tend to clutter your computer desktop the way I do (see Figure 1), then you'll find the key combination Microsoft Logo+D very useful. (Hold down the Microsoft Flag key and press D.) All the open windows will be minimized and the desktop comes into view. If you do the combination again, the desktop clutter returns in the same position as before. This works in all versions of Windows.

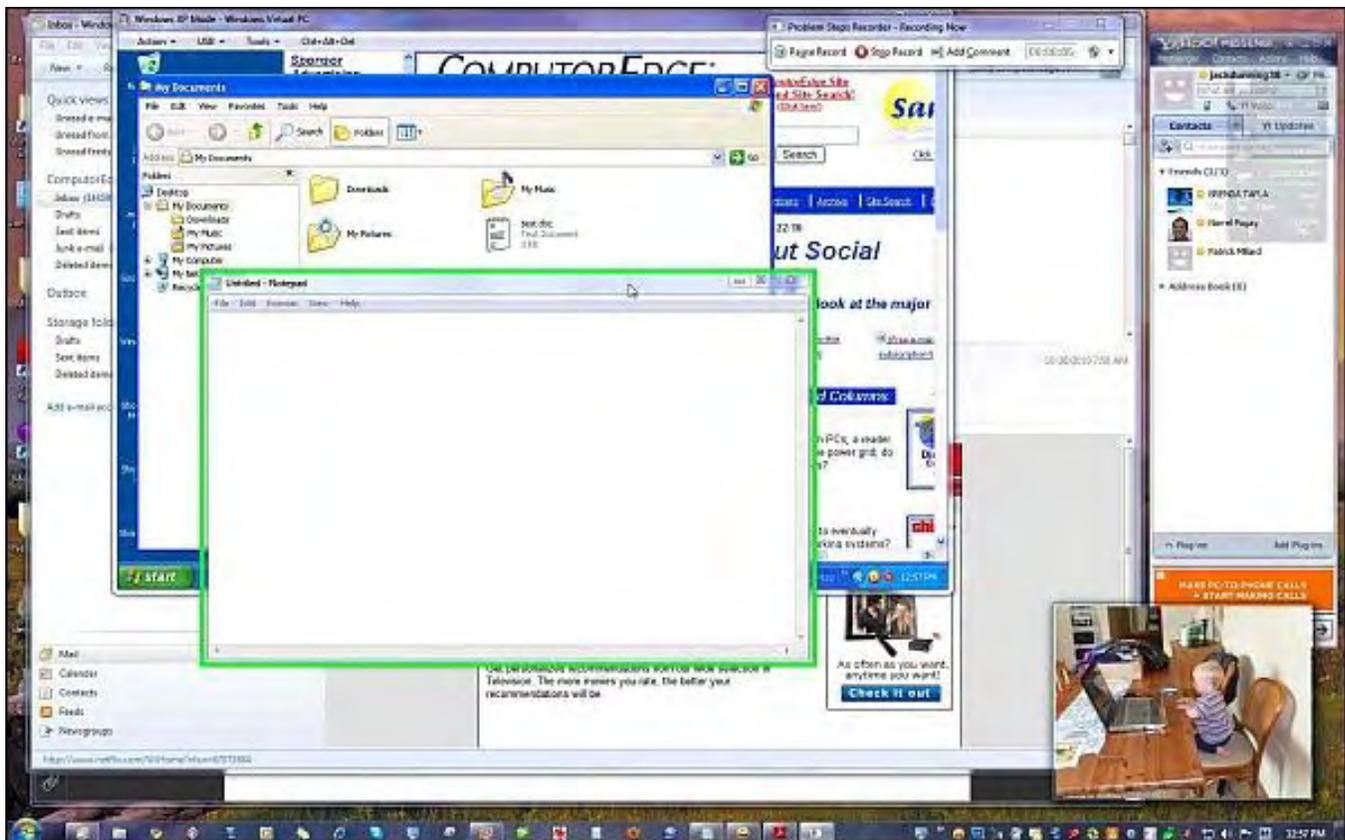


Figure 1. A cluttered Windows desktop.

In Windows 7 there are some additional features that may help to either peer through the clutter or get quicker organization.

There are times when you would like to minimize all open windows except the one you're working on. In the past you needed to either minimize each open window individually or right-click on the Taskbar tabs

to make the extra windows disappear. In Windows 7 you can clear the screen of all windows except the active one by using the Microsoft+Home key combination (see Figure 2). To return to the previous clutter, do it again.

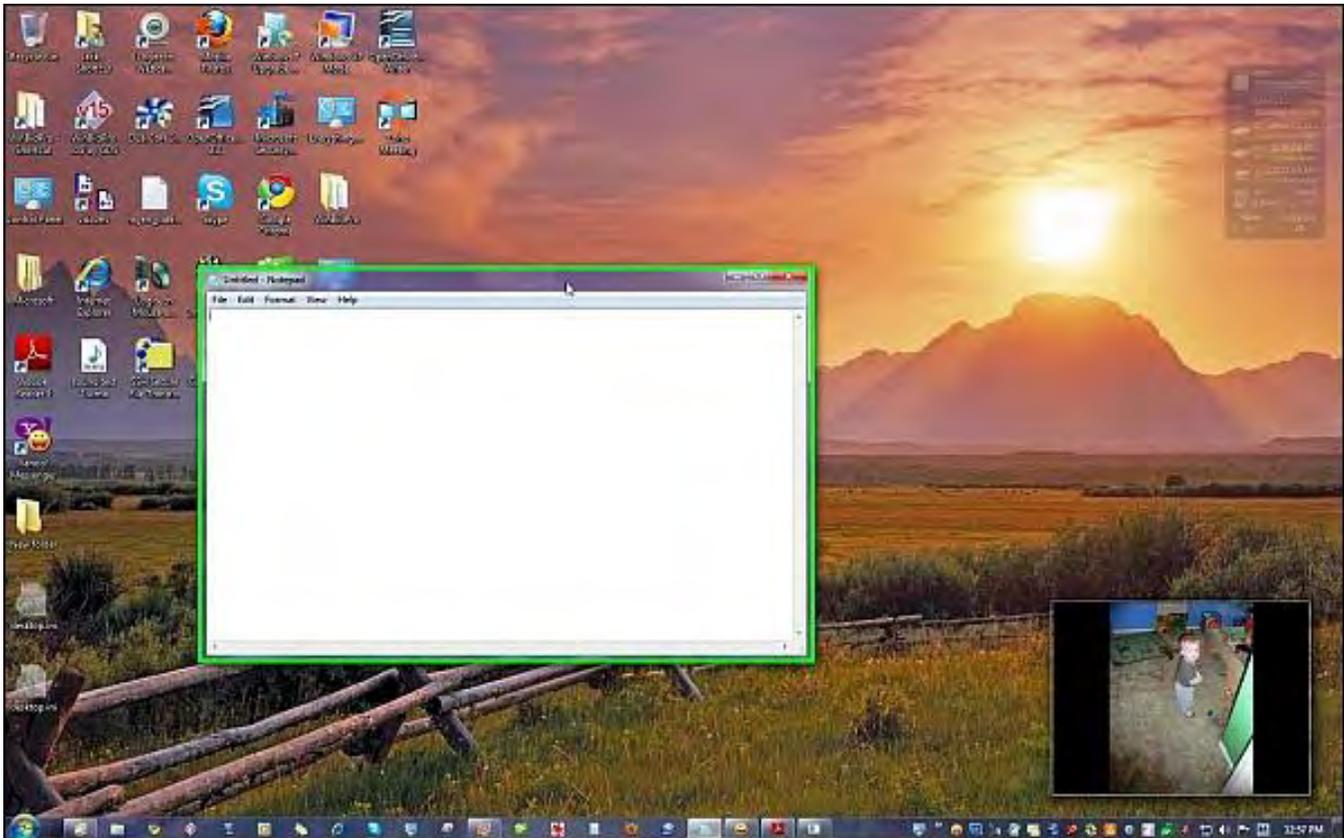


Figure 2. Windows 7 Desktop is cleared, leaving the active window open with Microsoft+Home.

Suppose you would like to resize your active window to take up 50 percent of the screen. (You may want to do this for a side-by-side comparison of two program windows—possibly for cutting and pasting from one to the other.) The Microsoft+Left Arrow combination will station the windows over the left 50 percent of the screen (see Figure 3). The Microsoft+Right Arrow key will do the same, only on the right side of the screen.

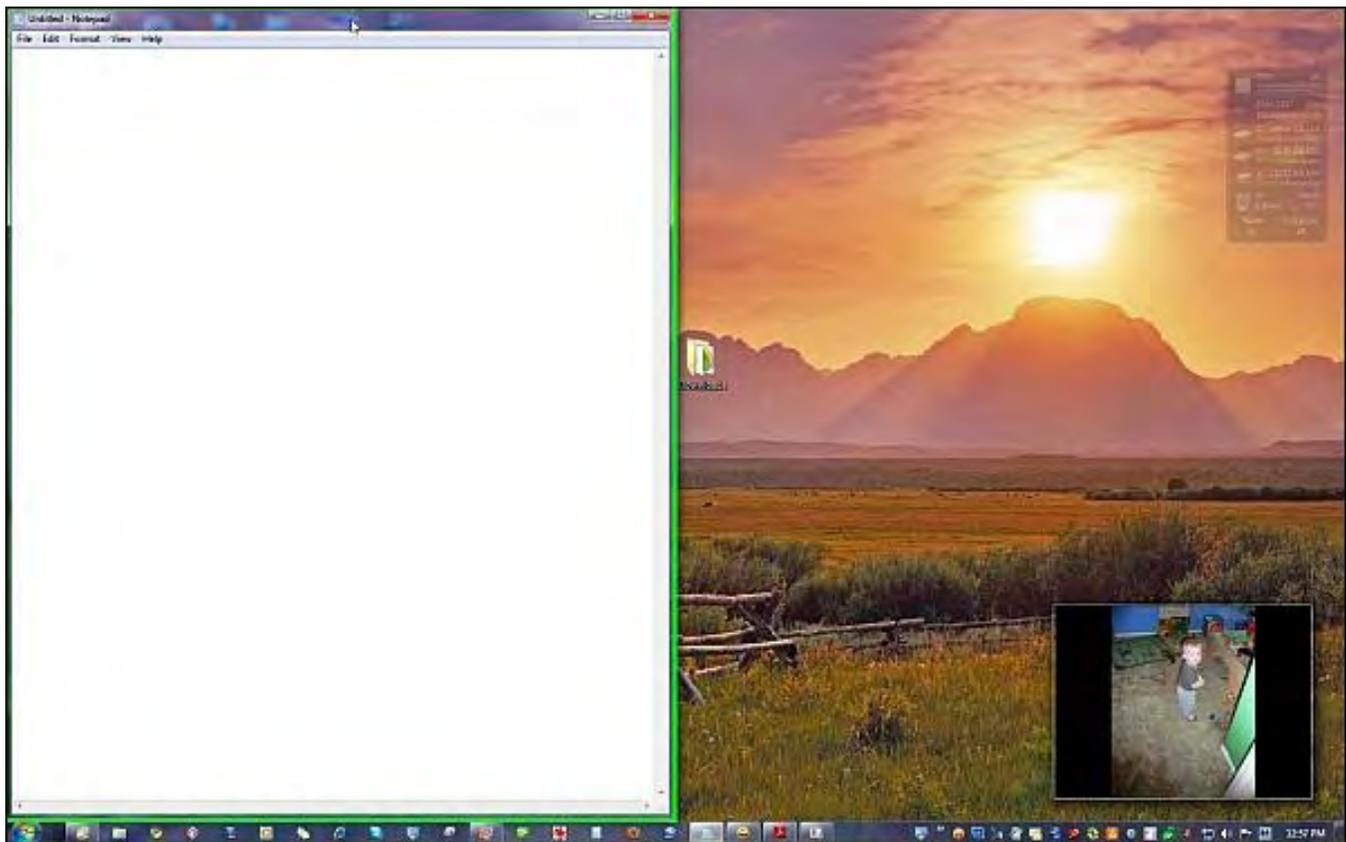


Figure 3. The active window takes up the left 50 percent of the screen with the Microsoft+Left Arrow key combination in Windows 7.

If you decide that you want the window on the right 50 percent, you could use the reverse combination twice, but it would be quicker to repeat the Microsoft+Left Arrow again and watch the window jump to the other side (see Figure 4).

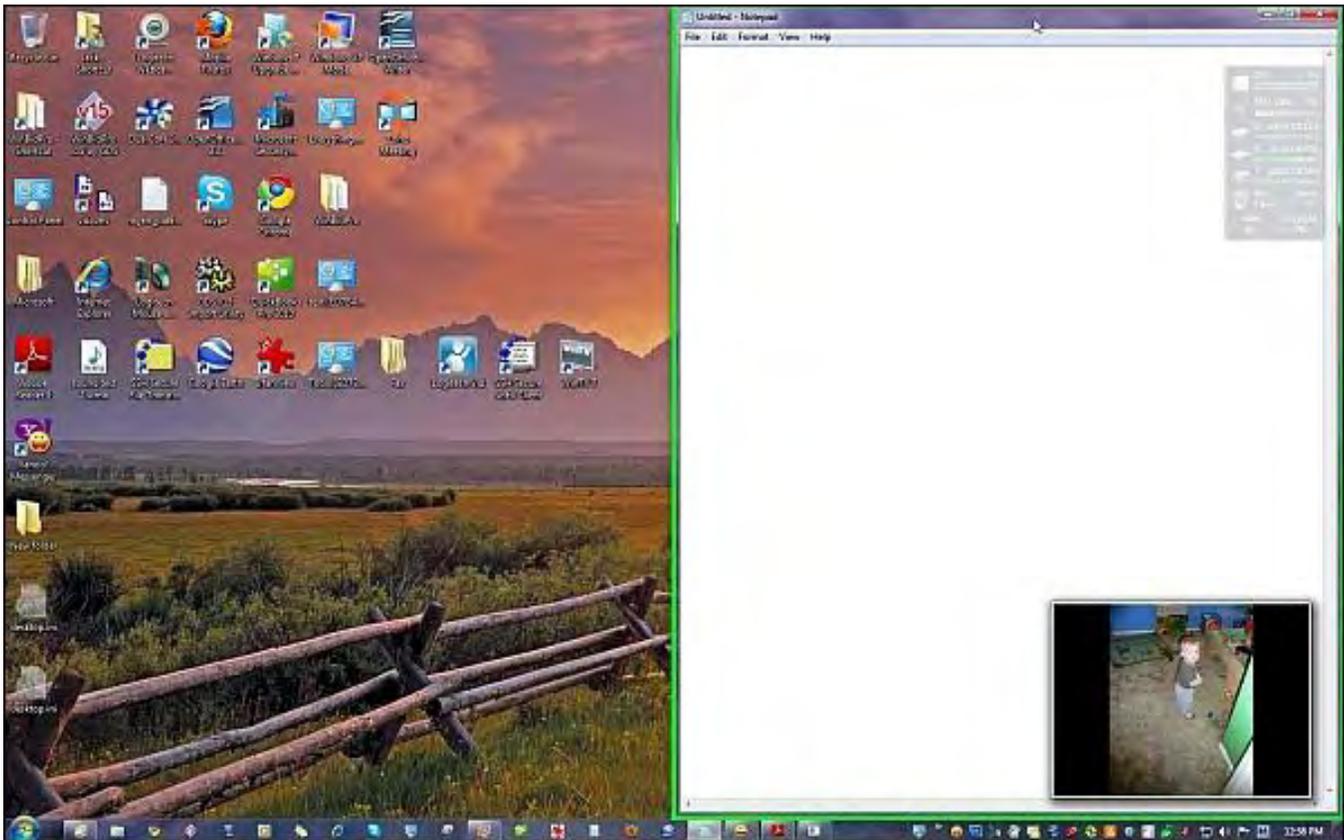


Figure 4. Do the Microsoft+Left Arrow again and the window will jump to the other side.

Do Microsoft+Left Arrow one more time in Windows 7 and the windows will return to their original size and location (see Figure 5).

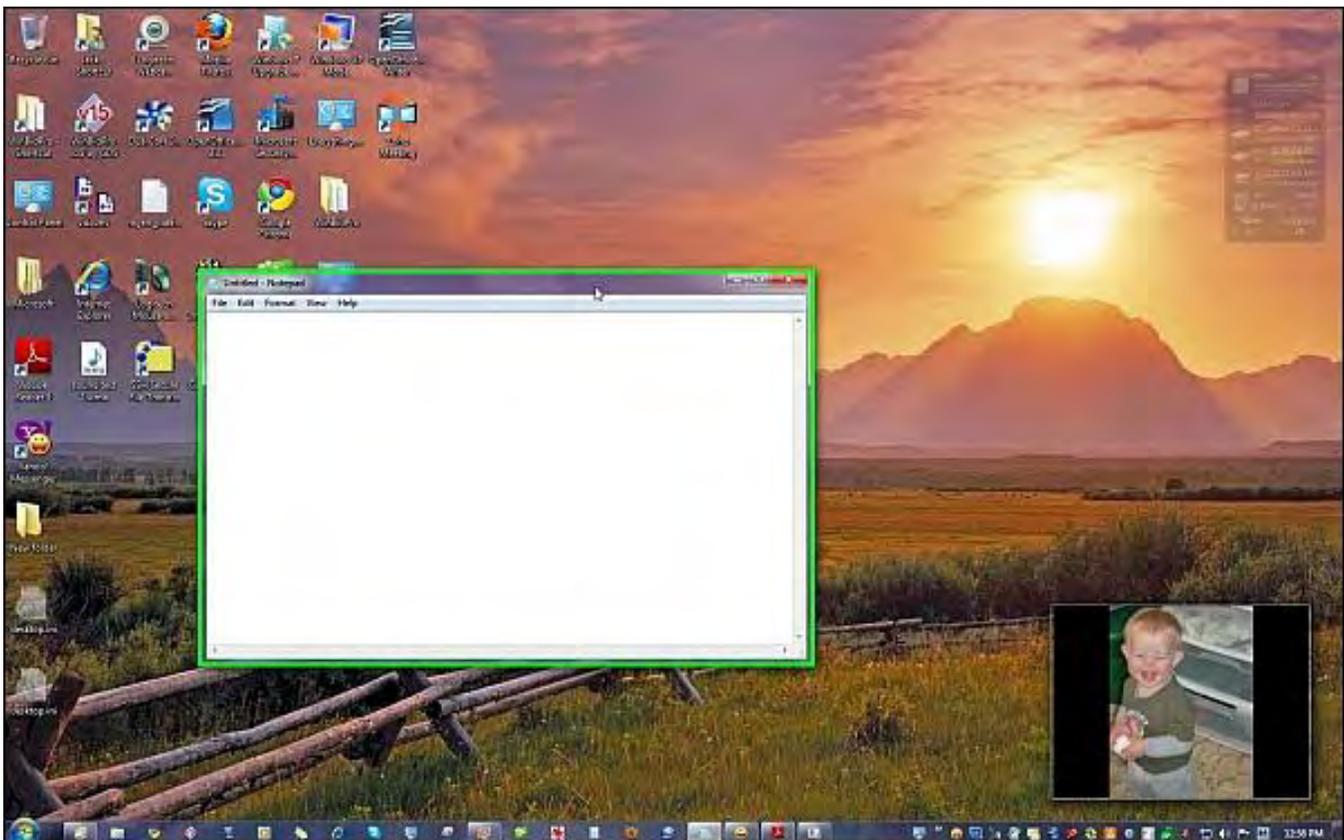


Figure 5. Microsoft+Left Arrow one more time in Windows 7.

Now, it's time to return all of the clutter to the desktop. That's how I'm most comfortable (see Figure 6).

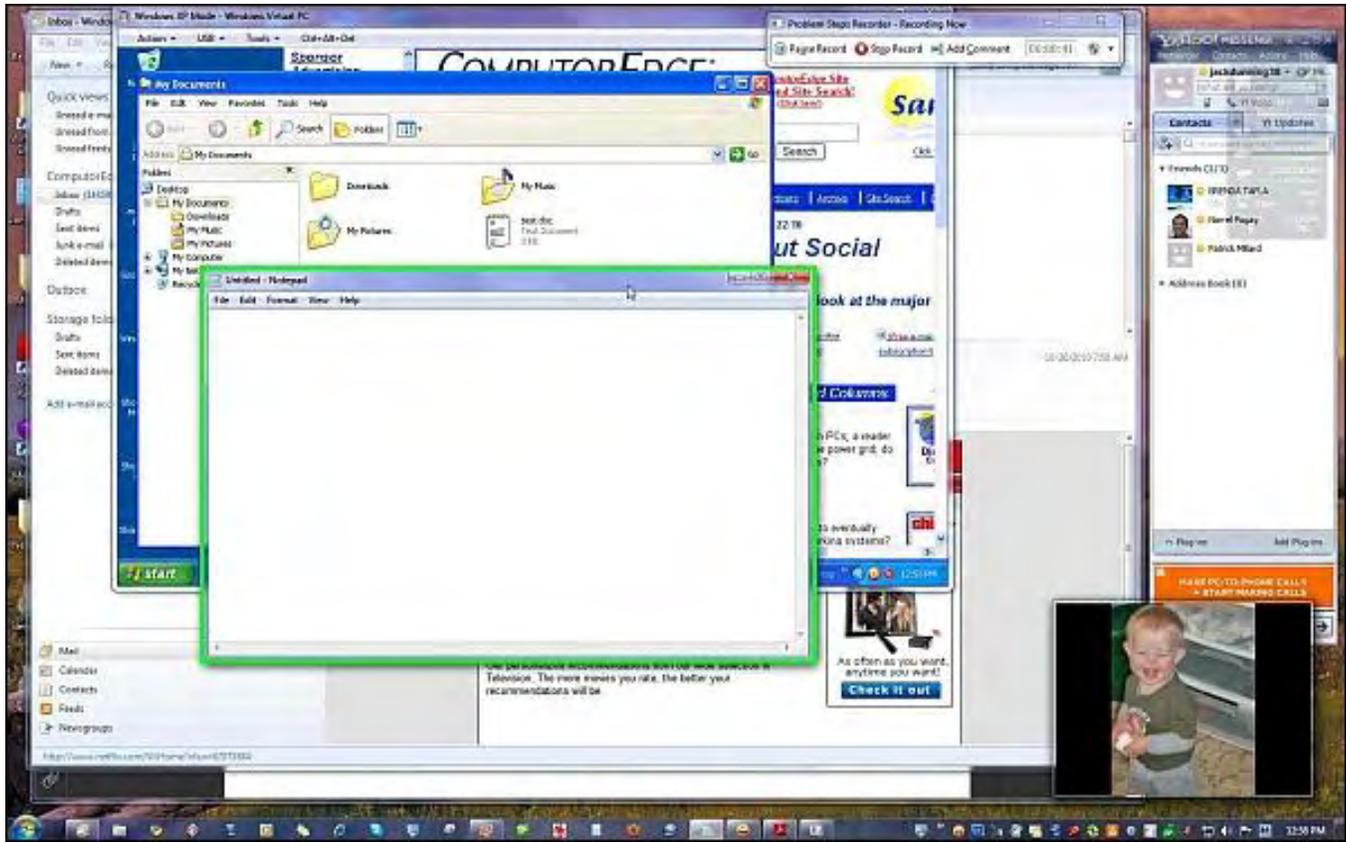


Figure 6. A cluttered Windows Desktop.

You'll notice that the only thing that has changed from the original desktop is the image of my grandson in the gadget in the lower right-hand corner. That gadget produces a slide show. These images were recorded in sequence with the Step Recorder.

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Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is [www.computoredge.com](http://www.computoredge.com). He can be reached at [ceeditor@computoredge.com](mailto:ceeditor@computoredge.com)

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## Wally Wang's Apple Farm

### Wally Wang's Apple Farm

“Malware on the Mac” by Wally Wang

While Mac OS X benefits from its Unix background, which provides basic safeguards to protect data from others users, hackers can pry open any operating system. Also, Microsoft Office 2011 for the Mac more closely mimics Office for Windows; the mythical HP Slate PC finally arrives; and a tip on making Outlook the default e-mail, calendar and contacts program.

In Las Vegas, every casino employs multiple layers of security to protect against cheaters, such as people who know how to physically drill into a slot machine and rig its inner mechanism.

Besides video cameras watching the casino floor, there are also uniformed security guards and undercover security guards. Yet despite all this security, every year someone still manages to drill into a slot machine, rig it and walk away with unearned winnings.

Operating systems are no different. While Mac OS X benefits from its Unix background, which provides basic safeguards to protect data from others users, hackers can pry open any operating system. The good news is that compared to Windows, the threats to Mac OS X are so minimal that it's possible to connect a Macintosh to the Internet without needing antivirus and anti-spyware software running at all times. (Visit any Apple Store in the world, such as the newly opened London or Shanghai stores, and you can find dozens of Macs running on the Internet with no antivirus or anti-spyware software whatsoever.)

For those concerned about viruses, grab a free copy of the ClamXav program ([www.clamxav.com/](http://www.clamxav.com/)). A program like ClamXav isn't necessary, but it's nice to have in case you want to feel more secure using your Macintosh.

Although billed as an antivirus program, ClamXav is useful mostly for guarding against worms, spyware and Trojan horses. The reason is because viruses are basically obsolete.

Check the McAfee's Trusted Source site ([www.trustedsource.org/en/threats/malware\\_threat](http://www.trustedsource.org/en/threats/malware_threat)) and you'll find mostly worms and Trojan horses listed with an occasional virus.

Viruses are dead technology because they can spread only by infecting a file. When you share an infected file, you share the virus. If you don't share an infected file, the virus can't spread. It's entirely possible to have a computer filled with infected files, but if you never share one of those infected files, the virus remains trapped on that one computer.

Let a virus loose and you have to pray that it will infect the right file that someone will share right away. On the other hand, let a worm loose and it knows how to propagate itself. A virus basically has to stand by the side of the road and wait for a passing car to pick it up. A worm can hop in its own car and drive wherever it wants. That's why worms are bigger threats than viruses and why viruses are mostly obsolete.

By themselves, worms do nothing but spread from one computer to another. The real danger is the payload that a worm delivers, which is usually spyware that captures keystrokes to retrieve passwords and credit card information. The moment the spyware captures sensitive information, it transmits it back to a malicious hacker.

Besides stealing information such as keystrokes, worms can also drop bots onto a computer, which lets someone else remotely control that computer. Hackers often infect thousands of computers to create networks of bots (called botnets), which they rent out to spammers. Now the spammers can blast millions of e-mail messages through the computers of unsuspecting people.

So the biggest threats to any computer are worms, which can be blocked with a firewall. The second biggest threat is Trojan horses, which must trick users into downloading and installing them.

One common trick is to send an e-mail (spam) to thousands of people, claiming that the attached file is a message from UPS that you need to open to receive a package. Once the recipient opens the attached file, the Trojan horse installs its payload, such as spyware or a bot.

To guard against a worm, you need a firewall. To guard against a Trojan horse, you need common sense. Since no firewall is 100 percent secure and people can always be fooled, no computer can ever be 100 percent secure either.

If everyone switched to Windows 7 tomorrow, the PC world would be more secure. For Mac users, the threat of infection from a virus, worm, or Trojan horse is far lower than a Windows PC, but it will never be completely secure either.

Apple's latest response to the looming security threat is its upcoming Mac App Store. The idea is that Apple will examine and verify that every program listed on the Mac App Store works and is uninfected (although they can still be fooled anyway). Therefore, if you only download software from this Mac App Store, you'll greatly minimize your risks of infection.

Malware such as worms, viruses, Trojan horses and spyware are just electronic versions of fraud that already exists in the everyday world. In the real world, you have absolutely no control over waiters writing down your credit card number when you pay your bill, hotel clerks copying your credit card number after you check in, or credit card company employees stealing your personal information that's already stored on their computers. Likewise, you have no control over whether a new worm will slip past your firewall or a new trick will fool you into installing a Trojan horse.

Your risk of becoming a victim in the real world or in the computer world isn't a matter of if, but when.

## Microsoft Office 2011 for the Mac

For years, Microsoft Office for the Mac lagged behind Office for Windows. When Office for Windows got the new Ribbon interface, Office for the Mac didn't. Where Office for Windows let you run Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) macros, Office for the Mac lacked equal VBA support. Where Office for Windows had Outlook, Office for the Mac had the much feebler Entourage.

Fortunately, Microsoft has corrected nearly all of these flaws with its new Office 2011 for the Mac. Besides adding VBA support and Outlook, Office 2011 for the Mac also includes the Ribbon interface along with standard pull-down menus, which is an option that Office for Windows doesn't even offer.



Figure 1. Office 2011 for the Mac offers both the Ribbon interface and pull-down menus.

Curiously, the Ribbon interface tabs on the Mac version aren't identical to the tabs on the Windows version of Office, but they work in similar ways. Click on a tab and a bunch of new icons appear, giving you one-click access to common commands.

Since the Ribbon interface can gobble up screen space to display all its icons, you can tuck this Ribbon interface out of sight if you want, just like you can do with Office for Windows.

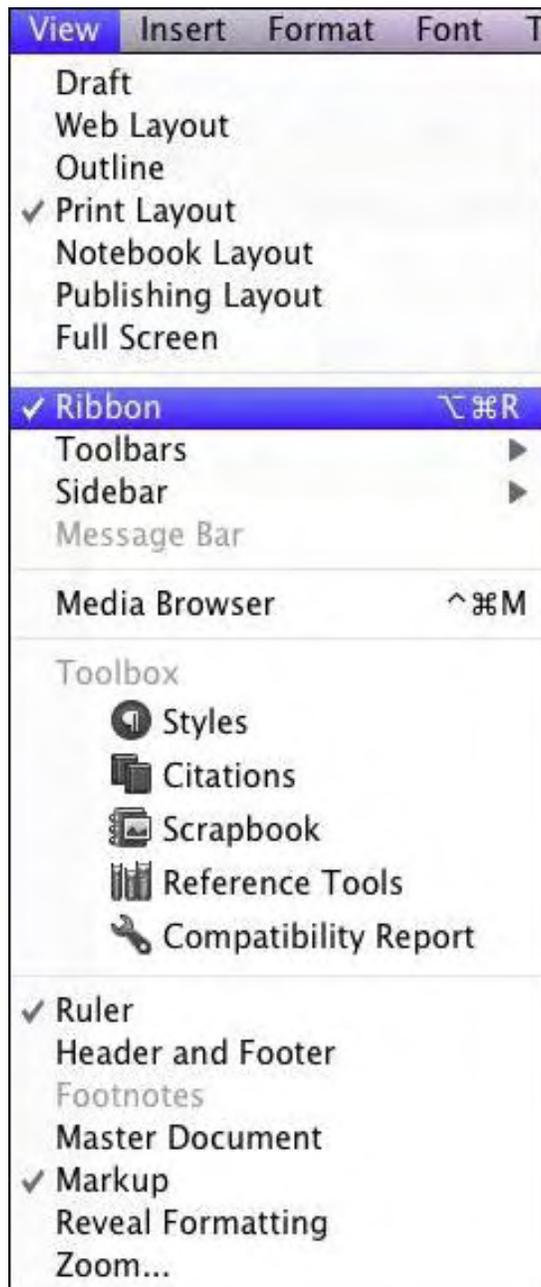


Figure 2. You can hide the Ribbon interface from sight.

Despite these minor visual differences, anyone familiar with Office for Windows will be able to start using Office for the Mac right away with few problems. Unfortunately, if you're more comfortable with the Office 2008 for the Mac interface with floating window palettes off to the side, you'll have to get used to the new Office 2011 for the Mac interface that more closely mimics Office for Windows.

For many people comfortable with Office for Windows, the main attraction will be Outlook for the Mac, which offers the usual features of viewing e-mail, calendars, tasks, or notes within different panes.

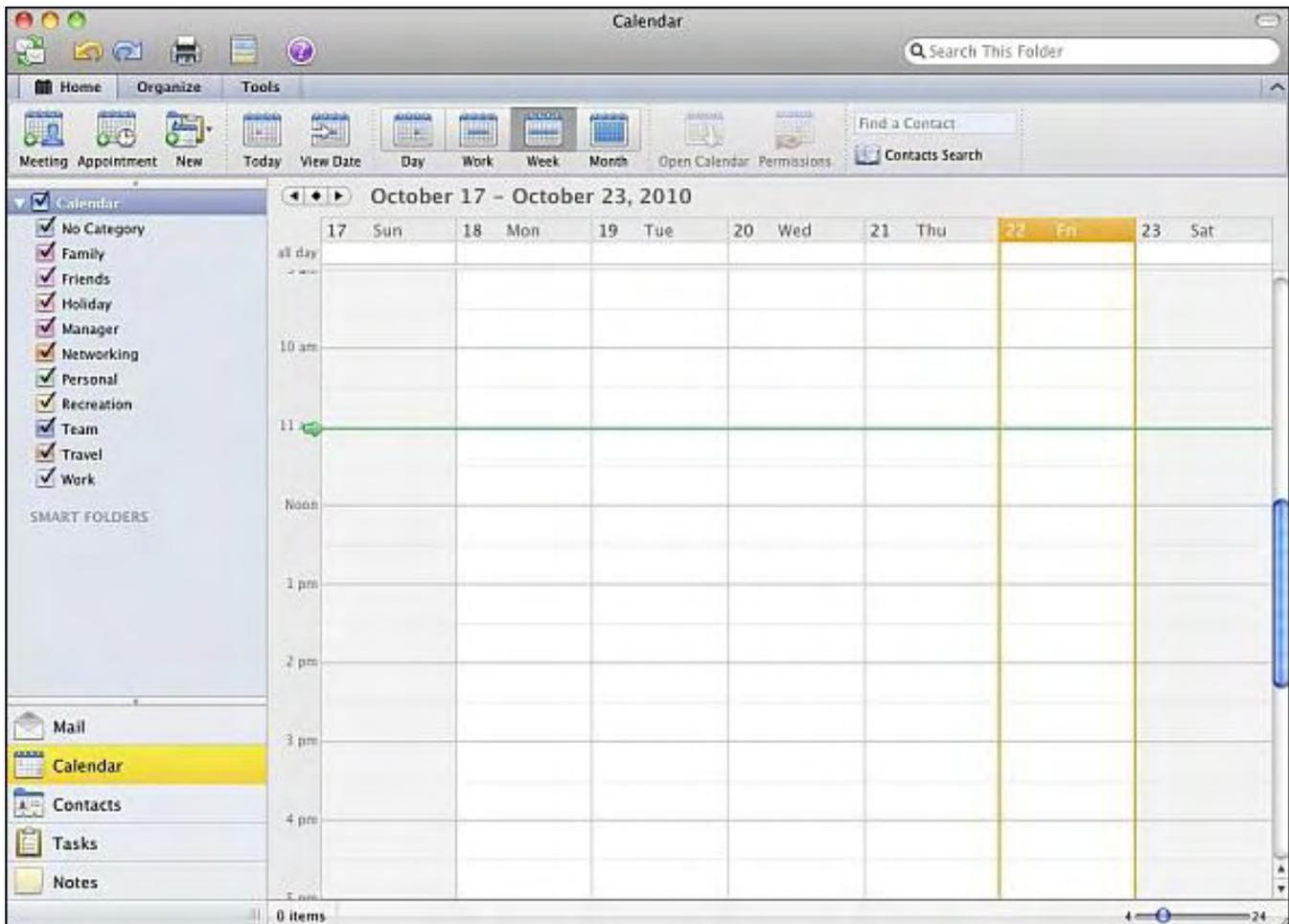


Figure 3. Outlook for the Mac closely resembles its Windows version.

While there have been challengers to Microsoft Office such as OpenOffice, OpenOffice simply lacks the huge library of templates that Microsoft Office offers for each program (Word, Excel and PowerPoint). In addition, Office for the Mac also incorporates unique Mac-like animated effects for displaying information on the screen. Instead of just displaying a window on the screen, windows flip around to show different information. While such animated effects aren't necessary, they do add a certain sense of fun to using the program.

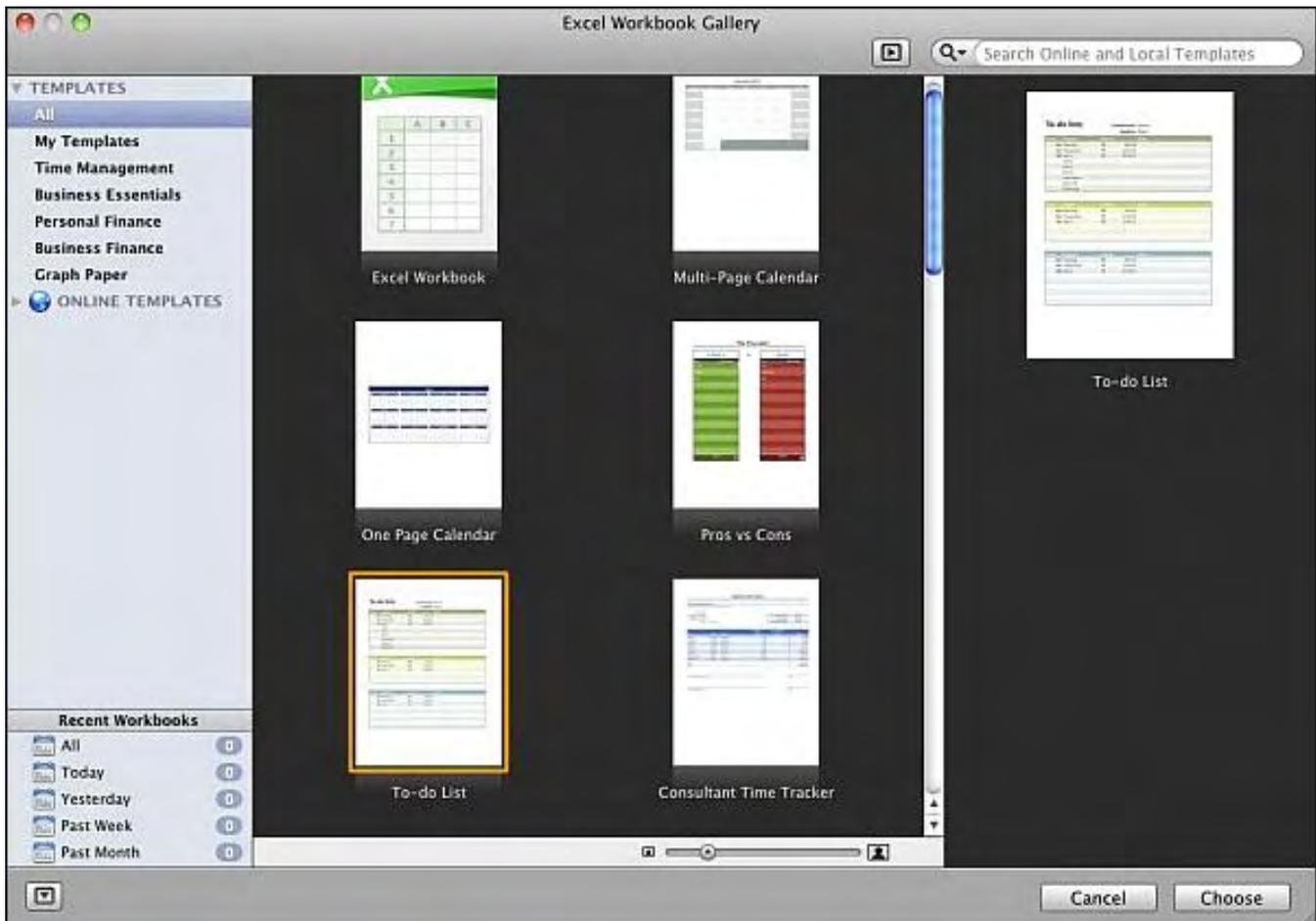


Figure 4. Office for the Mac provides plenty of templates to help you create the best documents possible.

Excel has made the biggest leap by adding sparklines, which let you create miniature charts inside of a cell (a feature introduced in the latest Office for Windows) along with a full-fledged Visual Basic macro editor. Theoretically, you should now be able to take your Excel macros from Windows and run them on the Macintosh with little or no modifications.

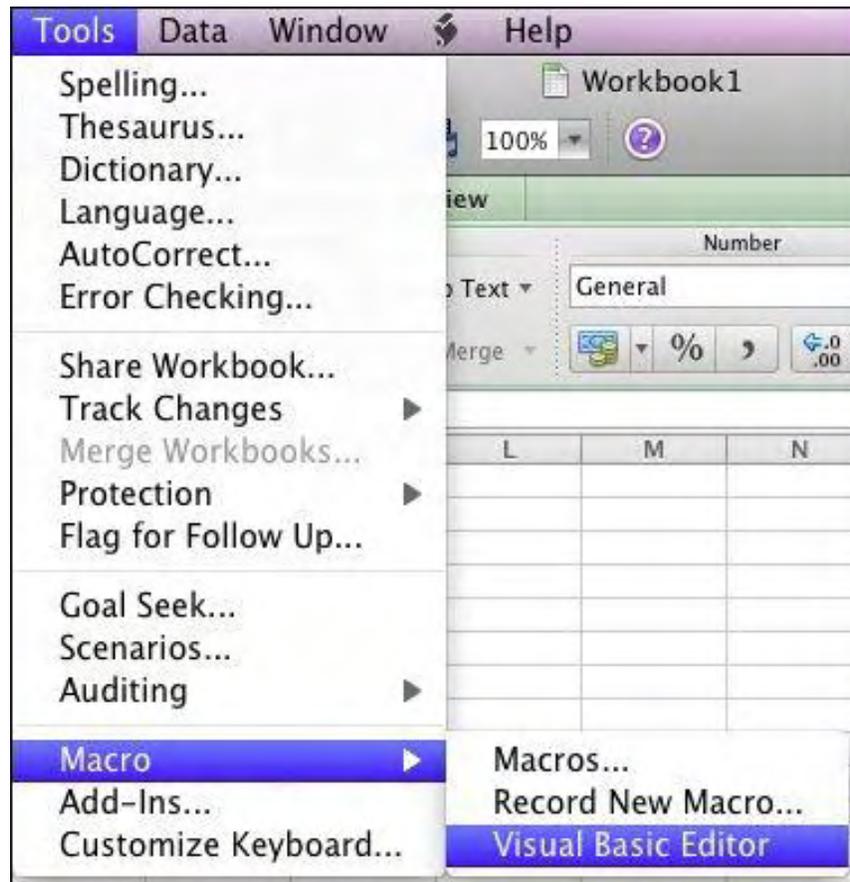


Figure 5. Excel offers full Visual Basic support.

If you're happy with an older version of Office for the Mac, there are plenty of new features (Visual Basic support, Outlook, the Ribbon interface, etc.) that might tempt you to upgrade. If you're currently using a rival office suite such as iWork or OpenOffice, you'll have to decide for yourself which features of the new Office for the Mac might make you want to switch. If you're a heavy Excel user or find the spreadsheet capabilities in iWork or OpenOffice a bit too weak for your needs, then you'll definitely want to upgrade to get the latest Excel on your Mac. If you rely on Outlook for Windows, then you'll also want to get Outlook for the Mac.

If you're currently comfortable using Office for Windows and want to make the switch to the Mac, then you'll definitely want to get Office for the Mac to make the transition much simpler and painless so you'll be able to work with all of your Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents with virtually no conversion problems.

The two biggest strengths of Office for the Mac are Excel and Outlook. If you don't have much need for either of these programs, then the updated versions of Word and PowerPoint may be intriguing, but not necessarily a must-have upgrade.

Pricing for Office 2011 for the Mac ranges from \$99 for an academic edition, \$119 (or \$149 to allow installation on three Macs) for a Home and Student edition ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/B003YCOJAI?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B003YCOJAI](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B003YCOJAI?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=B003YCOJAI)) that includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Messenger for Mac, and \$199 (or \$279 to allow installation on three Macs) for the Home and Business edition that includes Outlook for Mac.

One potential drawback for Office 2011 is that it requires activation to lock the software to a particular computer. This prevents you from installing Office 2011 on more than one computer, which might

immediately make it less attractive than OpenOffice or iWork.

Office 2011 for the Mac finally provides a version of Office that's equal to Office for Windows. If you want the power of Microsoft Office on your Macintosh, OpenOffice and iWork may be nice (and less expensive), but Microsoft Office 2011 for the Mac is still the office suite to beat if you rely on Excel or Outlook.

### The Mythical HP Slate PC Arrives

Back in January at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), Steve Ballmer, Microsoft's CEO, proudly showed off the HP Slate PC. Now nine months later, the HP Slate has finally arrived with a slightly smaller screen (8.9-inch vs. 9.7-inches for the iPad), lower battery life (4-5 hours vs. 10 hours for the iPad) and a price tag near the high range of an iPad (\$799 vs. \$499 to \$829 for the iPad).

The HP Slate does come with front and rear-facing cameras along with the ability to run Flash since it runs Windows 7. The real key to its success will be how useful people find controlling Windows programs in a tablet form without a mouse or keyboard.

To overcome any problems touching tiny icons designed for a mouse pointer, the HP Slate includes a stylus so you can tap and choose items on the screen. (Just don't lose that stylus.)

For a brief look at the HP Slate's features, take a look at eWeek's short slide show ([www.eweek.com/c/a/Mobile-and-Wireless/HPs-Slate-500-Tablet-Takes-Aim-at-Business-Professionals-466777/](http://www.eweek.com/c/a/Mobile-and-Wireless/HPs-Slate-500-Tablet-Takes-Aim-at-Business-Professionals-466777/)) about its features.

Hewlett-Packard claims that the HP Slate is for business use only, so the company is only selling it online ([h10010.www1.hp.com/wwpc/us/en/sm/WF05a/321957-321957-64295-3841267-3955550-4332585.html](http://h10010.www1.hp.com/wwpc/us/en/sm/WF05a/321957-321957-64295-3841267-3955550-4332585.html)). However, Hewlett-Packard initially promoted this slate at the 2010 Consumer Electronics Show as a consumer notebook slate ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIIjTDnX2Y0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIIjTDnX2Y0)). Another early promotional video ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3MSjwUrxT0&feature=channel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3MSjwUrxT0&feature=channel)) also seems to market the Slate toward consumers instead of businesses.

Yet another YouTube video ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=apwliqIKf84&feature=channel](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apwliqIKf84&feature=channel)) interviews one of the Slate PC's designers, who said that the Slate is the result of almost five years of research and that the Slate is designed to be "a mainstream product, not a niche offering."

So is the HP Slate a consumer or business device? Depending on when you listen to Hewlett-Packard, the answer is both and neither. That should clear things up about the Slate's real purpose and its five years of research that went into developing it.

\* \* \*

By default, every Macintosh makes Mail its e-mail program. However, if you want to make Outlook (or another program) your default e-mail program, load Mail and then choose Mail/Preferences to open a Preferences dialog.

Click the General icon and then select the e-mail program to use by default in the Default e-mail reader pop-up menu.

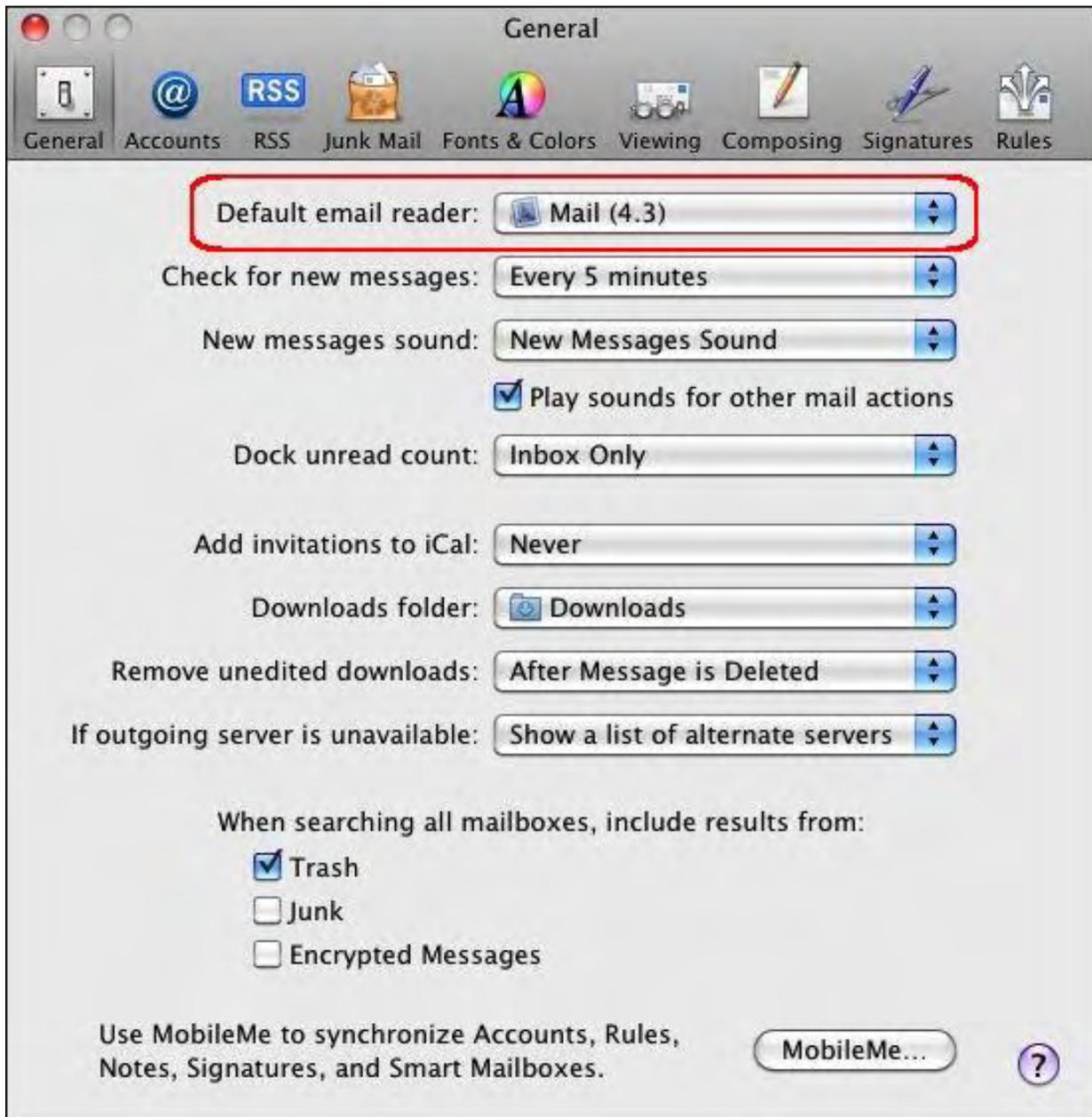


Figure 6. Choosing a default e-mail program.

You can also load Outlook and choose Outlook/Preferences to open a Preferences dialog. Then click the General icon. Finally, click the Make Default button to make Outlook your default e-mail, calendar, and contacts program (instead of Mail, iCal and Address Book).

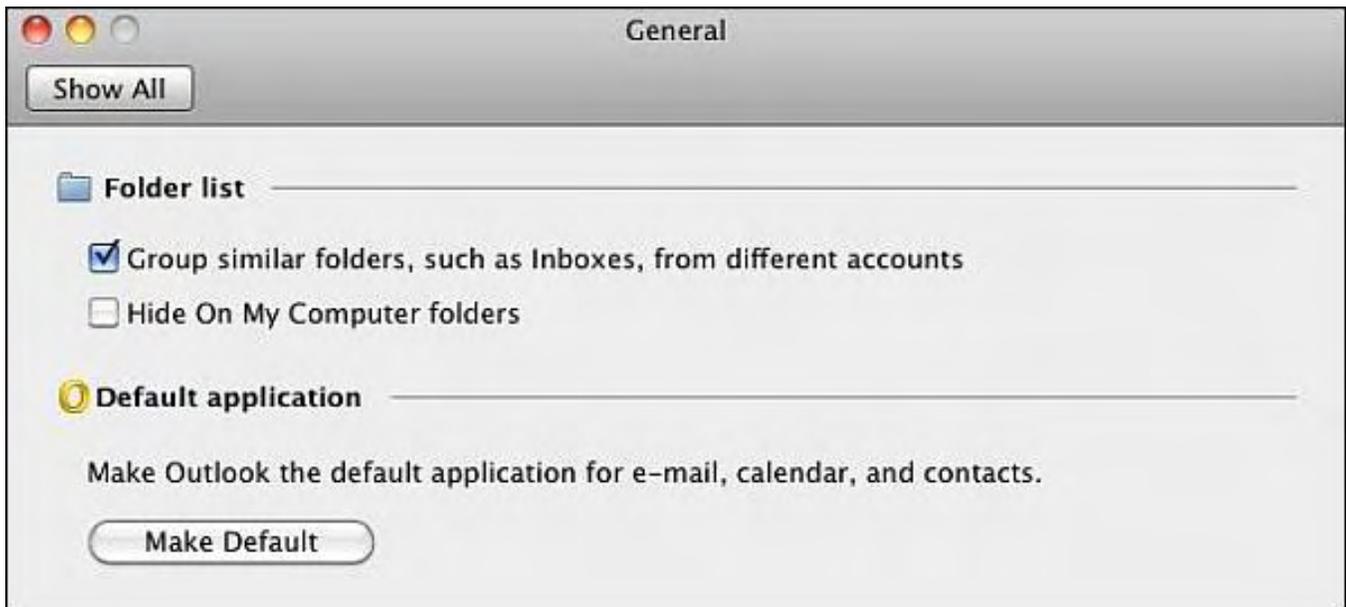


Figure 7. Making Outlook the default e-mail, calendar and contacts program.

In the early days, before Wally became an Internationally renowned comedian, computer book writer, and generally cool guy, Wally Wang used to hang around The Byte Buyer dangling participles with Jack Dunning and go to the gym to pump iron with Dan Gookin.

Wally is responsible for the following books:

- Microsoft Office 2010 for Dummies ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470489987?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470489987](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470489987?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470489987)),
- Beginning Programming for Dummies ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470088702?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470088702)),
- Beginning Programming All-in-One Reference for Dummies ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0470108541?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0470108541)),
- Breaking Into Acting for Dummies with Larry Garrison ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0764554468?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0764554468)),
- Steal This Computer Book 4.0 ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271050?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271050)),
- My New Mac ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271646?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271646](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271646?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271646)),
- My New iPhone ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271956?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593271956?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593271956)),
- My New iPad ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593272758?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593272758](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1593272758?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1593272758)),
- Strategic Entrepreneurism with Jon Fisher and Gerald Fisher ([www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1590791894?ie=UTF8&tag=the15minmovme-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=1590791894)),
- How to Live With a Cat (When You Really Don't Want To) ([www.smashwords.com/books/view/18896](http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/18896)).

When not performing stand-up comedy or writing computer books, he likes to paper trade stocks with the

video game Stock Reflex ([www.plimus.com/jsp/download\\_trial.jsp?contractId=1722712&referrer=wwang](http://www.plimus.com/jsp/download_trial.jsp?contractId=1722712&referrer=wwang)), using the techniques he learned from a professional Wall Street day trader.

In his spare time, Wally likes blogging about movies and writing screenplays at his site "The 15 Minute Movie Method." ([www.15minutemoviemethod.com/](http://www.15minutemoviemethod.com/)) Wally can be reached at [wally@computoredge.com](mailto:wally@computoredge.com).

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## Rob, The Computer Tutor

### Rob, The ComputerTutor: Technology Solutions

“Open Office Spreadsheets” by Rob Spahitz

This week we wrap up our investigation of the Calc tool from OpenOffice, a free competitor to Microsoft's Office suite. Calc is the competition for Excel.

This week we wrap up our investigation of the Calc tool from OpenOffice, a free competitor to Microsoft's Office suite. Calc is the competition for Excel. As a reminder, you can download the free OpenOffice applications from [www.OpenOffice.org](http://www.OpenOffice.org).

Although there are many more interesting features of this tool worth exploring, such as accessing a data source (menu View/Data Source) and including sound (menu Insert/Object/Sound), I'll complete my investigation by exploring macros to see how they compare to Excel macros.

#### Macros

So what is a macro? Well, it's the opposite of a micro, sort of. You probably envision something small when you hear the word micro. A microcomputer is a small version of a computer (although these days you rarely see the behemoth computers of the 1960s, except in movies). And macro? That must be something big.

In this case, the term macro is referring to a command. A microcommand would be a very small or simple command, such as Insert 123 into a cell. Conversely, a macrocommand would be a large or complex command, such as Insert 123 into a cell, format it in red and show a dollar sign and two decimal position and a black box around the cell.

Macros are typically created for several reasons: (1) to complete a repetitive task more easily, (2) to make a large collection of commands easier to complete without error, and (3) to make a hard-to-remember command easier to complete without researching how to use it. Let's explore one of these.

Suppose that your job is to take a 1,000-row sheet and highlight alternating rows in a different color, such as light blue, as seen in Figure 1.

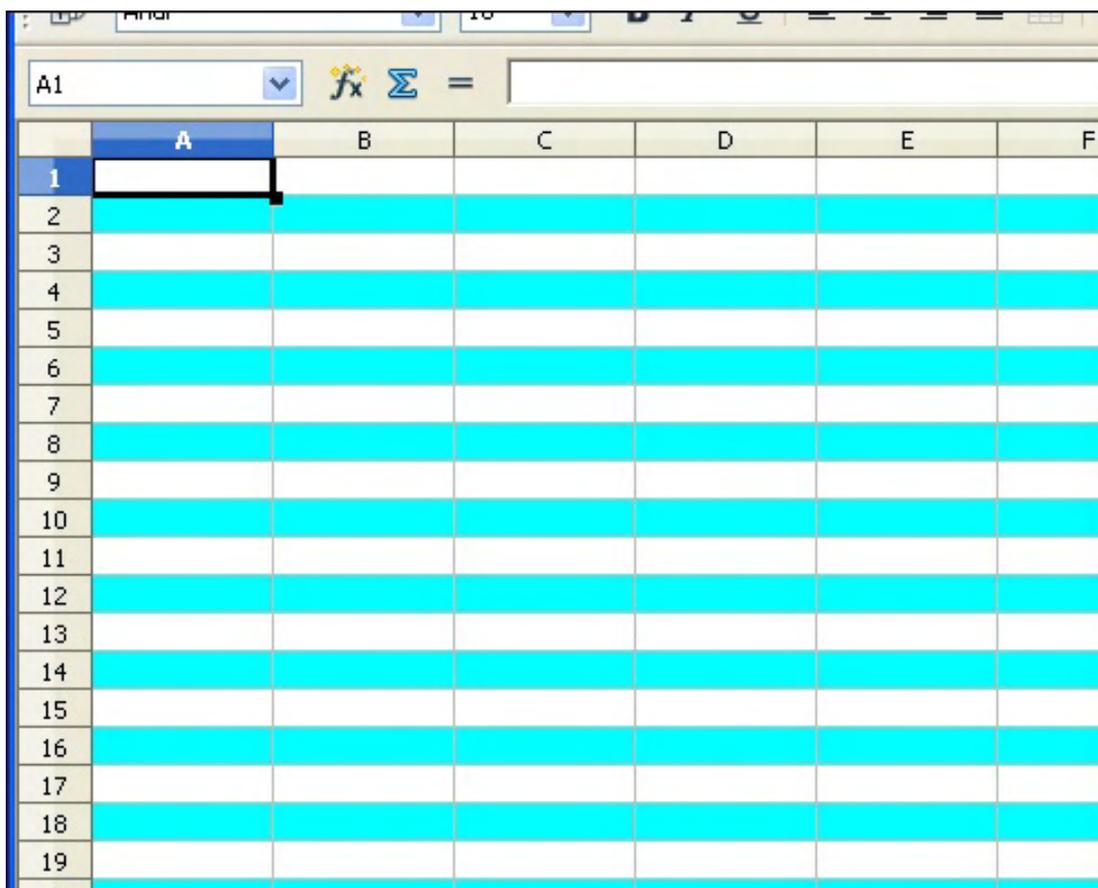


Figure 1. Highlighted rows.

As you can imagine, there is no built-in command for this. It's also a very easy task to perform. However, that simple task is also very tedious. There are some tricks you can use to achieve this more easily, but suppose you just couldn't figure out any tricks for this. What would you do?

The simple answer is to train the sheet to handle it for you. For example, think about how you would approach this task. Would you start on row 2 and highlight it, then jump to row 1,000 and highlight it, and then row 4, then row 268, then row 44, etc.? Most likely not. You would probably highlight row 2, then row 4, then row 6, then row 8 until you got to row 1,000. Alternately, you might start at row 1,000 and work your way down.

This is a very logical approach because it is simple and gives guaranteed success (if applied consistently). This process could even be described to someone in relatively simple terms: Highlight row 2, go down 2 rows and repeat until you complete to row 1,000.

This set of commands can be called an algorithm, and algorithms work very effectively in the computer world. Anything predictable can be programmed. And macrocommands are all about creating a collection of commands and giving them a single name for easy access.

Let's see if Calc macros can help us with this task.

First, understand that macros are not especially smart. You have to program them to do what you want. However, because the language used to program them is not something that people intuitively know, Calc (as with Excel macros) offers a way to "record" your macro. The idea is that you simply turn on the recording, process the collection of commands that you want to perform in their normal way, and then stop the recording. What you get is a macro written in the language of the tool, ready for retrieval and reuse.

How does that help us here? In our case we want to highlight a bunch of rows, not create something that will be reused. Although that's true, if you don't know the language, you may not know where to start. This process can give you clues about how to create or modify the programming. Furthermore, we can break down our process into smaller steps. For example, we can record the process of highlighting a row and moving down two rows. Then we simply need to apply that 500 times to get to row 1,000. Let's try that and see what happens.

### Creating a Macro

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Start with a new blank sheet by opening OpenOffice.org's Calc application.

In the Tools menu, select the Macros option and then Record Macro, as seen in Figure 2.

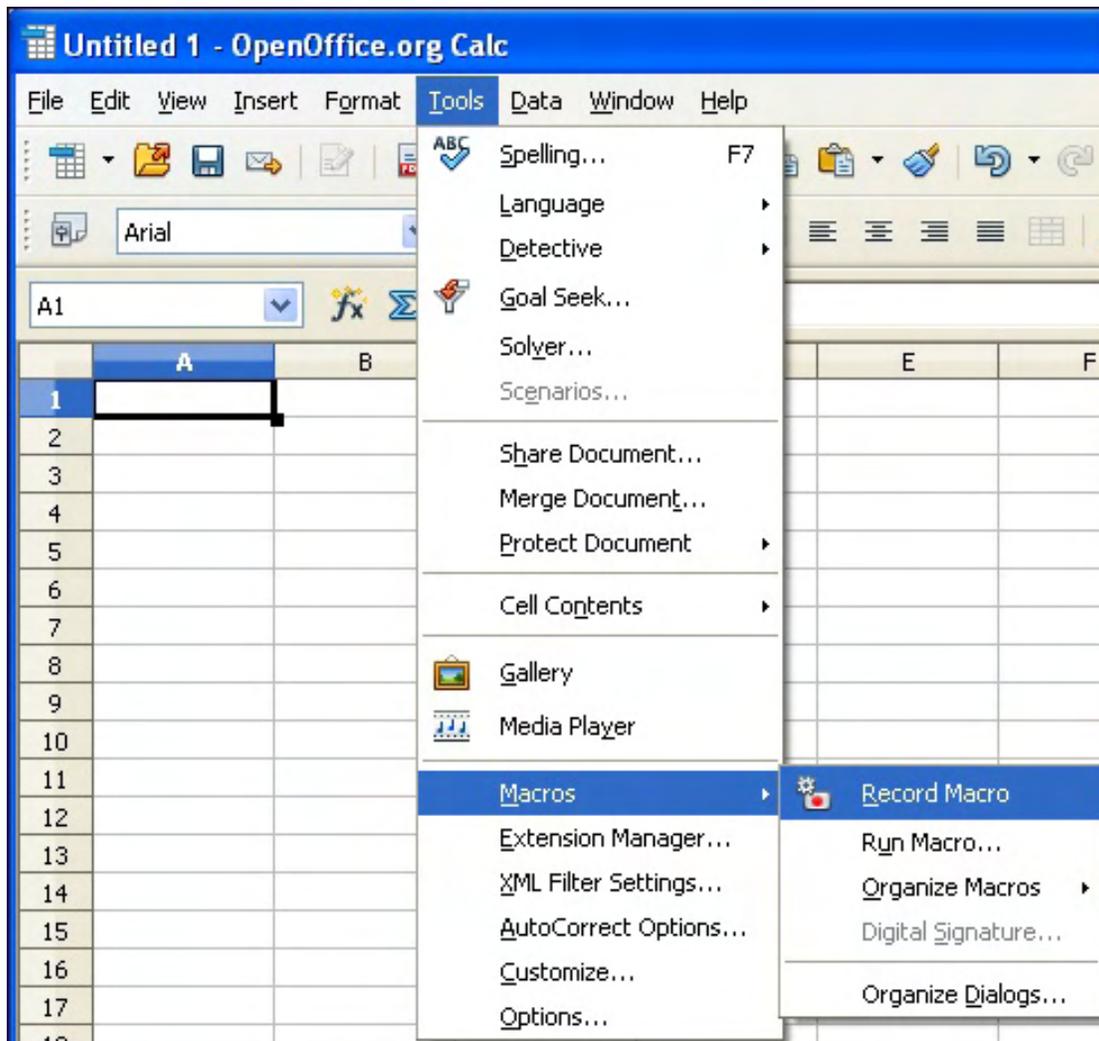


Figure 2. Recording a macro.

This will activate the macro recording and should start capturing various Calc commands such as text entry, formatting and cell changes (but not mouse movements). You should see a small box, shown in Figure 3, indicating that the recorder is on.



Figure 3. Macro recorder activated.

Now start the process we'd like to record: Select row 2 (mouse over the "2" on the left edge and click), change the background color to light blue (right-click the mouse and select Format Cells, click on the Background tab, pick any light blue box as seen in Figure 4, and click the OK button), and use the arrow keys to move down two rows.

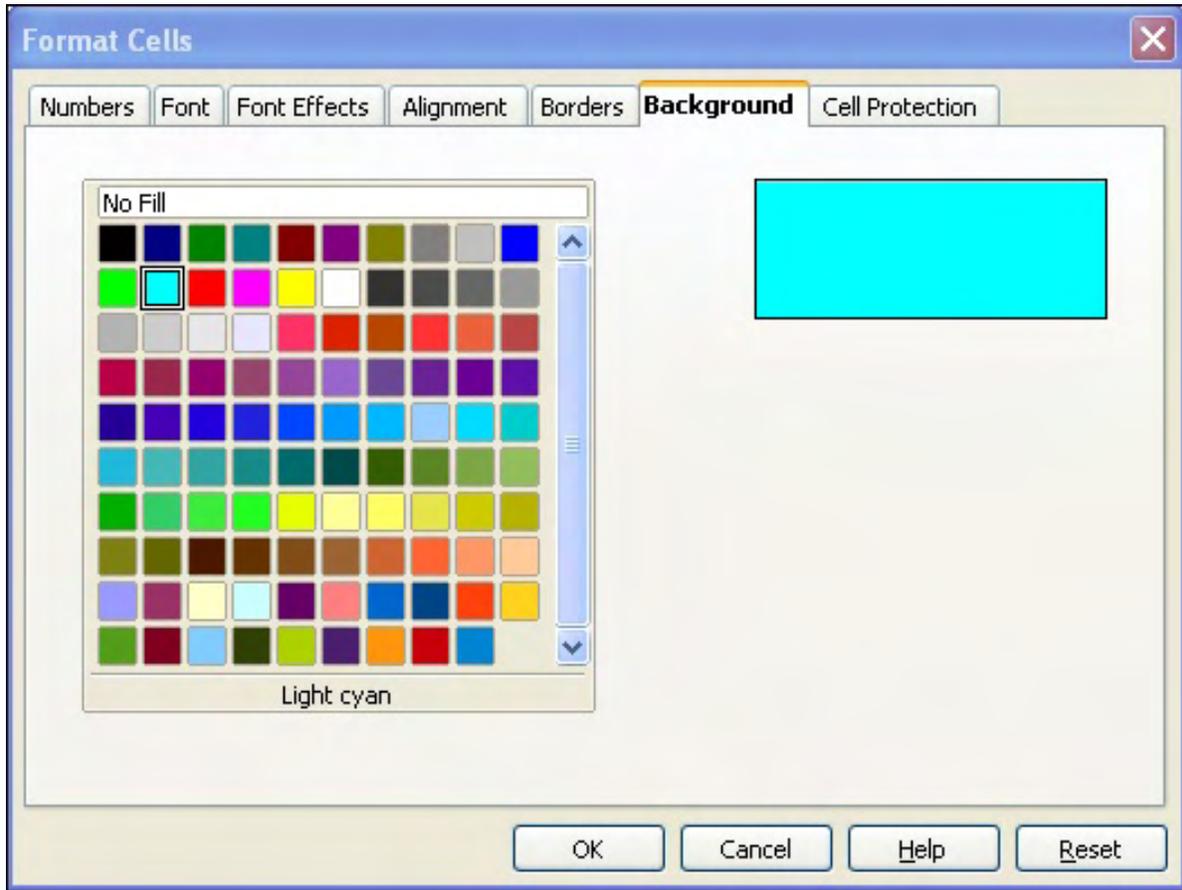


Figure 4. Change a cell's background color.

Now that the task is complete, click on the Stop Recording button in the box that opened when the recording was started. You will be presented with a new window to allow you to save the macro, as seen in Figure 5.

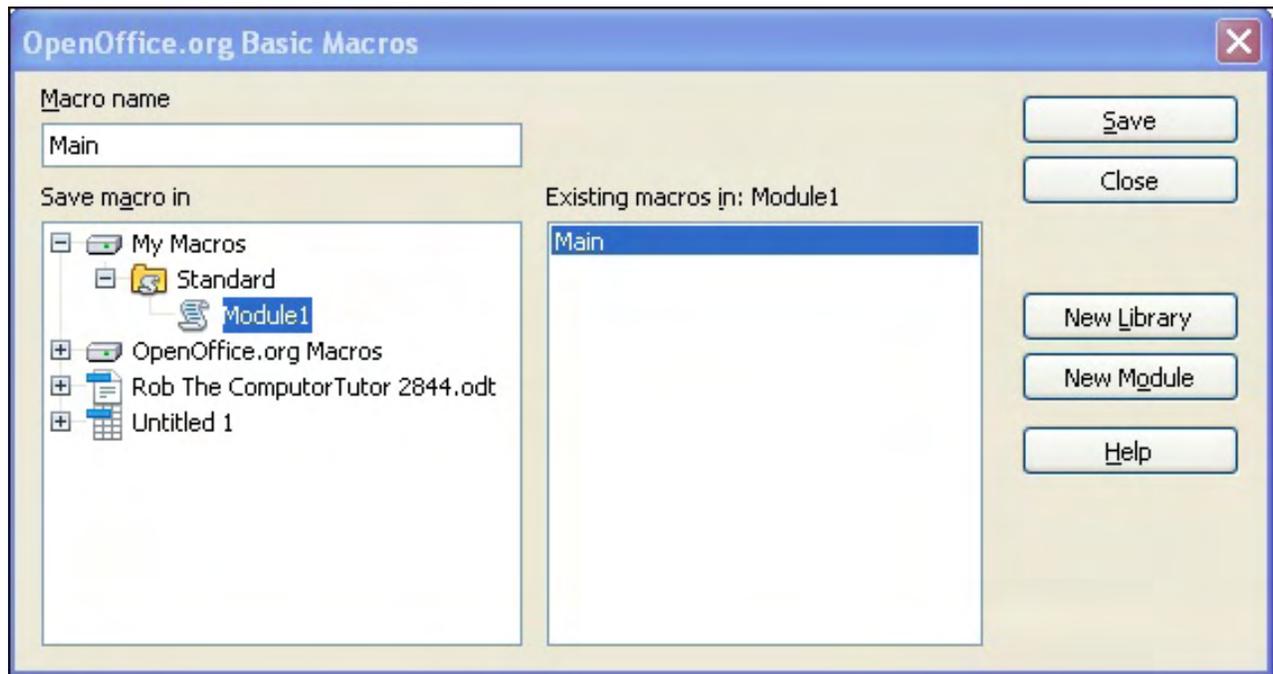
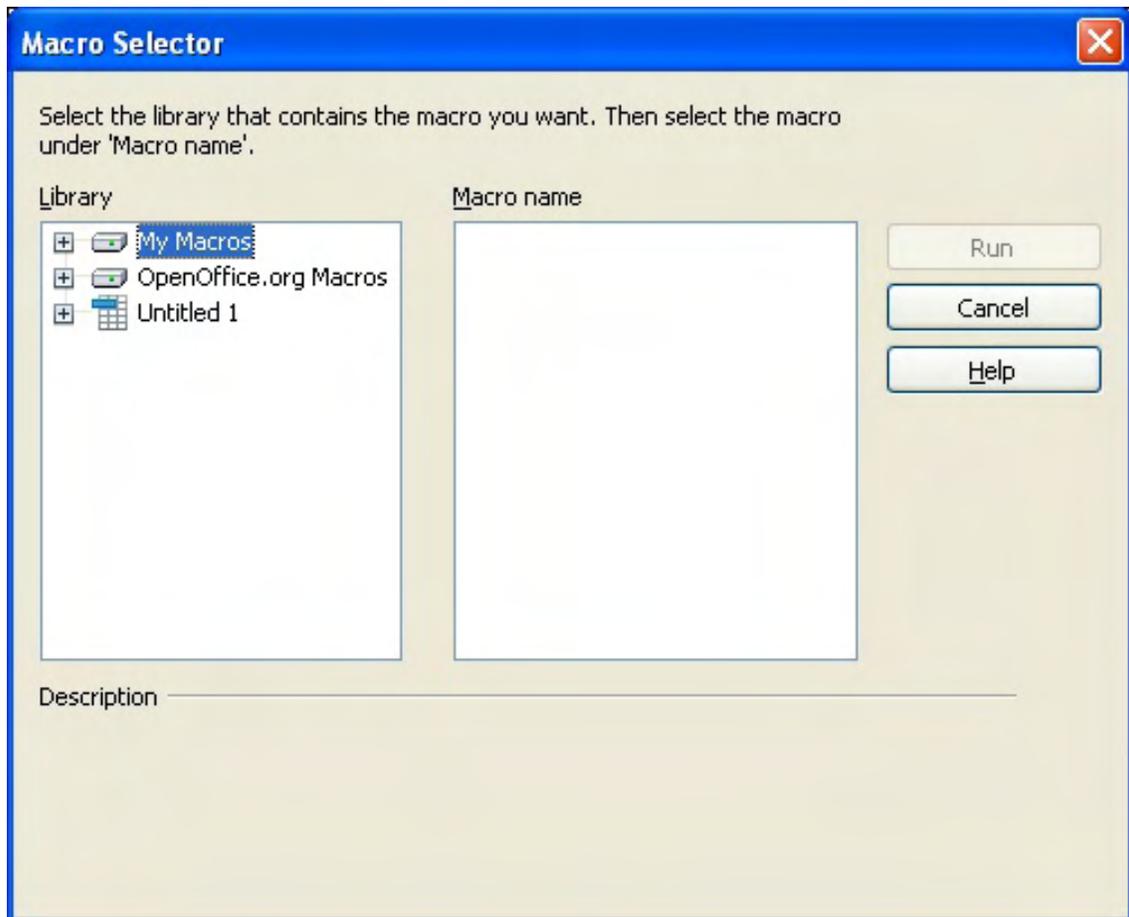


Figure 5. Saving a macro.

In the first box, replace the word "Main" with "HighlightRow" and click on the Save button. Your macro is now ready for reuse. At this point, depending on how Calc records macros, it may be ready for use immediately or we may have to adjust it. With cell A4 selected, let's run the macro and see what happens.

Back to the Tools menu, select Macros and Run Macro. You should get a new window to let you select your macro, as seen in Figure 6.







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## [Adventures on the Internet 101](#)

“Legal Snooping and Secret Sources” by Marilyn K. Martin

It's quite easy and perfectly legal to dig up the dirt on anyone or anything. All it takes is a quick search in your favorite search engine and the murky journey begins.

As a full-time freelance writer, there are times when I'm in no mood to research, write or market my pieces. So I decide to take a "virtual adventure" on the Internet to seek out information on people, places or topics that have been niggling with curiosity in the back of my mind.

"Hacking" is highly illegal and, like video games, is more about the thrill of creating crises than actually acquiring information. "Breaking into" some seemingly impenetrable network fortress must harken back to the days of castle sieges and catapults. Only today hackers skitter through electronic networks to unlock codes, instead of lobbing a boulder over a stone wall. A lot safer, too, instead of risking the loss of life and limb with medieval weapons. Today hackers just end up in prison with body and limb tattoos advertising their Life Shredder gang affiliation. Which is in keeping with the times, I guess: less risk—more advertising.

But there seems to be unending high drama for the hacker population, many of whom seem obsessed with hacking for the "trivial." Like hacking into the Pentagon cafeteria at will and rewriting menu items. Although you'd think all those generals would catch on. Especially after they head to the cafeteria after viewing the online daily specials of "Blood-and-guts Stew, Extra Rare Bin Laden-burgers with Cave-fries, and Drone-drumsticks with Gamer-goo."

Actually, it's quite easy and perfectly legal to dig up the dirt on anyone or anything. Those sages who intone that "some secrets can be kept forever" are in for a big surprise if they actually go looking.

All you have to do is start by setting your search box default (usually in the upper-right corner of your Internet screen) to an All Web search engine. Then enter a public name or topic into your search box and type "secrets" or "surprises" after the name. You will suddenly turn up a vast and strange list of links, some with profanity or warning messages that they are unsafe to open.

Avoid all the deranged and virus-cesspool sites, of course. And don't fall for the rumor-mongering pop-culture sites about who's dating, marrying, pregnant, divorcing, cheating, hiring, firing, lying or being sent back to rehab stories. Entertaining, but untrustworthy. Just as you are twittering someone about a celebrity divorce, that celebrity's publicist is already announcing a reconciliation.

And try to stay away from the ridiculous and well-traveled conspiracy theories that have been fleshed out to deflect and absorb your attention—and measure your gullibility. As well as the inflammatory bloggers

who make stuff up just to get read, increasing their blog's "traffic" and thus (they hope) attracting more advertisers. You can forget trying to corroborate their accusations anyway.

Sifting through what's left will introduce you to some very strange, possibly long-hidden but usually verifiable items on your chosen public person or topic. And be warned: You will not be reading tidy, formatted stories with all the loose ends tied up.

More likely, you will be reading dusty tidbits from local newspapers, never picked up by the national media, usually about an investigation into a well-known serving politician's "alleged" financial irregularities, which could involve campaign funds, a family inheritance, bogus charities, awarded-contract kickbacks, or a foreign mistress and/or illegitimate children being paid for with tax dollars.

Or else you'll be perusing media archives about a public figure's shady friends and relatives, who may or may not have involved the public figure in their illegal activities. Especially since, as the public figure's lawyer repeatedly stated, those deposits to the PF's primary bank account of a cool one mil every six months, were merely "earned dividends" from their "Restaurants On Pontoons" factory in Asia. (Just don't expect that public figure to have actually ever visited this ROP factory. Or to even know exactly where it is.)

You may even end up reading back-and-forth forum posts, with dueling "proof" for both sides of an event or topic. These forum discussions can be quite lively, and always seem to start out with the same three kinds of posters: Cheerful Questioner, Passing-By Commenter, and the Dour Denier. After the first page of basically civil exchanges, the forum drama can then splinter into one of several formats. Most often, the Cheerful Questioner gets called "an idiot," answers in kind, and the discussion dies.

Or more Passing-By Commenters join the fray and, if this is a professional science forum, politely add interesting and intelligent tidbits to flesh out the original posted question. Or else the Dour Denier takes over, who must own major stock in whatever companies exist opposing the original topic, and keeps hammering on the "No-Can't Be-Never-Impossible-Numbskull" theme, and all the other posters quickly disappear.

Turning up interesting tidbits in this search-for-secrets is only half the battle. If you want to turn your surprising secrets into a school essay, research paper or media article, you have to nail down multiple verifying sources. And "verification" like "His Aunt Holly remembers that he was late to be potty-trained, and thus showed early signs of procrastination," just won't cut it.

On the other hand, you could hit the motherlode of high drama and be reading about porn star mistresses, new identities for wanted criminals, money stashed in the Caribbean, hidden illnesses, and unsavory or outright illegal ties to mobsters or drug cartels. Then again, if you have no specific person or topic in mind, and just want to take a shortcut to find these kinds of entertaining revelations in one place, just head to the online Chicago Tribune.

Chicago politics was formed in Prohibition days, and still seem rooted in speak-easy passwords, shady backroom deals, unholy alliances and breaking bones if crossed. Chicago politics, even today, is not so much about leadership, as "Managing Mayhem and Limiting Collateral Damage." And it makes for very entertaining reading, especially if you head to the paper's local political-analysis section called "Clout Street."

If you research your topic thoroughly, however, you will soon be confronted with uncovered or tangent "secrets" that open up totally new and surprising topics. Suddenly your head is spinning with more questions than answers: Are the Chinese really going to drill for oil in Texas? Why does the foreign press know more about what's really going on in Washington, D.C. than we do? Does a super-secret "Project: Gaia" really exist?

If you search out "official released secrets" sites, you are bound to be disappointed. Sites like Cryptome are mainly lists of dubiously "received" government documents, with daring and tantalizing titles like "New Bridge Construction and Repair Materials," or "DoD Physical Access Control Policy Guidance," which are actual titles. (The latter of which sounds remarkably like gov-speak for "Lock and encode all doors. And hire security guards wearing Kevlar, and carrying real guns that shoot real bullets.")

Actually, the only real drama at Cryptome is its ongoing war against hackers. Or at least those lower- to middle-tier hackers who must envision a site of leaked government documents like "Outer Continental Shelf Energy Safety Measures" (a real title), the ultimate in hacker prizes. Especially now that most government sites have implemented fry-your-computer-thru-Internet-laser-feedback security measures.

So you scroll down below Cryptome's document lists to the Entertainment section, and see an "exposed" photo of some hacker kissing a stuffed barnyard animal. While you solemnly read that such "kissing" is a well-known and meaningful signature to street prostitutes and vice squads.

Really? I have a sister who collects this kind of stuffed animal. And as far as I can recall, not one has gone missing after departed visitors or a burglary. ("Local Police Blotter: The home at 105739 Barely-Visible-Thru-The-Foliage Drive reported a break-in Friday. Items taken included a laptop computer, costume jewelry, 30 DVDs and six stuffed barnyard animals. The stuffed animals were quickly recovered when a cruising patrolman spotted them in the arms of barely clothed, mostly females off Main Street in an alley. Subjects are well known to police on night patrol, with or without stuffed animals.")

Maybe the appeal of digging up answers with more questions attached is more about intellectual curiosity than trying to nail down any elusive truths. Maybe, on a deep psychological level, we really don't want to know everything about anything. Or vice versa. Maybe, like hackers and video game addicts, we just secretly want to savor that treacherous hunt through the jungle. You know, pop-out thrills and chills at every turn, and the dangerous truths barely exposed or hinted at by the conclusion.

But if living in a (perceived) scary world of impending doom is your idea of "fun," then you need to move on to Adventures On the Internet, Part Deux: Dystopian Fun and Games. (Or "Preparing for 2012/ Asteroid Impact/The Rapture/Environmental Crises/Global Financial Meltdown/Barely Survivable Extreme Disasters.") Or, as I refer to it, Scaring Yourself Silly for a Natural Adrenaline High.

Just keep your stuffed barnyard animal collection under lock and key. No one wants their toddler's precious embrace-and-kiss photo with their favorite stuffed barnyard bedtime animal splashed across the Internet in 30 years, when he wants to run for city council.

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Marilyn K. Martin is a freelance writer of nonfiction and fiction living in East Texas. She is the author of several published mini-articles and is currently writing a Young Adult Science Fiction series, *Chronicles of Mathias*, ([www.amazon.com/Chronicles-Mathias-One-Reptilian-Rebirth/dp/1598249002](http://www.amazon.com/Chronicles-Mathias-One-Reptilian-Rebirth/dp/1598249002)) Volume One and Two are available on Amazon.

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## EdgeWord: A Note from the Publisher

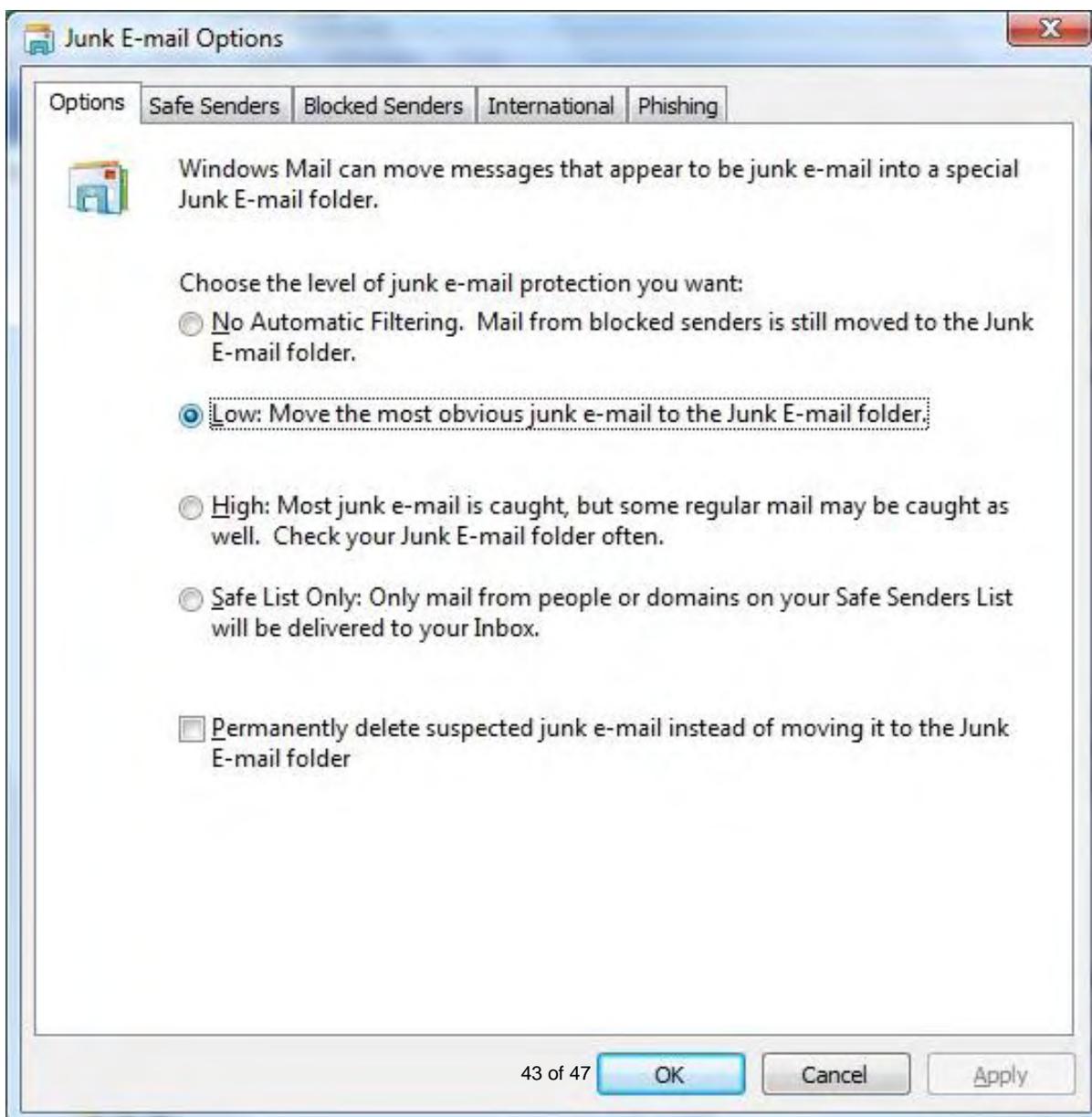
“One Man’s Junk E-Mail May Actually Be Legit” by Jack Dunning



Whenever you are waiting for an e-mail that just doesn't want to arrive, check your Junk or Deleted Items folders. There may be some reason why the message was misdirected.

The other day, I was signing up for an electronic ID to e-file some government reports. At one point I was waiting to receive an e-mail with the Web site with more links for confirming the process. The e-mail wasn't getting to me as quickly as I would have liked. In fact, it just wasn't arriving to my mailbox at all. This was particularly frustrating since I couldn't continue the process without that e-mail. Eventually, I decided to check my Junk e-mail folder. Voila! There it sat, waiting for me—or hiding from me.

I quickly reviewed the e-mail, but couldn't figure out what caused it to land in my Junk e-mail folder. I checked my filters, but they had done nothing to cause the movement of the message out of my Inbox. I opened "Junk E-mail Options..." under Tools in my Mail program (see Figure 1). I had it set on Low filtering, which sends a good bit of spam to the Junk folder, but not all of it. But it may occasionally send a valid message to this dead-letter storage facility, as it must have in this case.



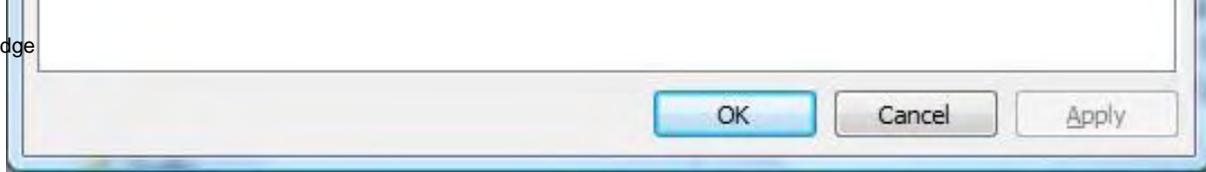


Figure 1. The Junk E-mail Options window in the Microsoft Mail program.

The only way to make sure that you never have valid e-mails sent to a spam folder is to turn off your filtering. There is no surefire way to detect all spam, nor can you prevent an occasional legitimate e-mail from getting caught up in the spam filtering net. That means it behooves you to check your Junk folder from time to time. I don't do this often enough.

As I was scanning through the Junk folder, I noticed another non-spam e-mail. That made me wonder how many more there could be in that mass of 25,000-plus messages. While I wasn't about to take the time to go through everything, I did find one or two more message that it would have been useful to receive. Nothing was critical—at least not that I found. (I may have missed an important deadline, or, even worse, the opportunity to win \$1 million.)

The moral of the story is: Whenever you are waiting for an e-mail that just doesn't want to arrive, check you Junk or Deleted Items folders. There may be a weird coincidence that has caused the message to be misdirected. Plus, on occasion you should check the same folders just in case something important sneaks in there. You will also get to see all of the garbage that you didn't need to review when it first arrived. Some of it is very creative. (Don't click any links!)

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Jack is the publisher of *ComputerEdge* Magazine. He's been with the magazine since first issue on May 16, 1983. Back then, it was called *The Byte Buyer*. His Web site is [www.computoredge.com](http://www.computoredge.com). He can be reached at [ceeditor@computoredge.com](mailto:ceeditor@computoredge.com)

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## Editor's Letters: Tips and Thoughts from Readers

“Computer and Internet tips, plus comments on the articles and columns.” by ComputerEdge Staff

"Importing from a Web Page Into Calc," "USB Flash Drive FAQ," "Computer-to-Computer Crossover," "Offline Firefox Viewing," "3-D on the Big Screen," "Internet Telephony," "The Netflix Label: An Excellent Overview"

### Importing from a Web Page Into Calc

[Regarding the October 8 Rob, The ComputerTutor: Technology Solutions column:]

I read your article on OpenOffice's Calc without falling totally asleep. I'm not a power user and don't use Calc or Excel for a living, although I could probably make a better living than I do now if I were to be a power user of this type of program. Anyhow, I tried to import something simpler as my test of Calc: Namely, the list of contents in your e-magazine's header. "*ComputerEdge* Site Map and Site Search!"

It imported correctly, with each item in its own cell and no extra characters. I used Paste Special when I clicked in cell 1 and then right clicked. I'm sure you have many power users who read your mag, but I don't think many of them would be using a free copy of a Microsoft Office lookalike suite. At any rate, it seemed to me that your test and explanation were way over the heads of your average *ComputerEdge* reader.

-Buck F., El Cajon, CA

### USB Flash Drive FAQ

[Regarding Pete Choppin's October 8 article, "USB Flash Drive FAQ":]

This is a great article. Useful and very timely.

-David Lawrence White, San Diego, CA

Pete Choppin's article was "music" to flash users, making him a true namesake!

-Lynn Manning Ross, San Diego

### Computer-to-Computer Crossover

[Regarding the October 8 Digital Dave column:]

[Dave] suggested the crossover Ethernet user use an IP address such as 192.168.5.15 and 192.168.5.20 with a Subnet Mask of 255.255.255.0 and no Default Gateway. Fine.

He said: "The numbers 15 and 20 in the fourth set of numbers merely differentiate the two computers. They could be any numbers between 0 and 255 as long as they don't match."

The problem is that 0 and 255 are *not* useable for end devices: computers, servers, network printers, etc.

With your example, this is the breakdown:

255.255.255.0 (This is the 24-bit Subnet Mask you specified)  
192.168.5.0 (Network Address reserved for use by network devices i.e. Network Routers)  
192.168.5.1 through 192.168.5.254 (Usable IP Addresses for end devices)  
192.168.5.255 (This is the reserved broadcast address)

-Justin B., Beaufort, SC

*You're right. I should have been clearer, although I did say "numbers between 0 and 255," which would not include either 0 or 255.*

-Digital Dave

Offline Firefox Viewing

[Regarding the October 8 Digital Dave column:]

Adam: Try downloading the Read it Later add-on for Firefox. I have been using it for a while now, and it's a daily part of my Web experience.

-Todd

I think DD missed a crucial element. The original poster had mentioned viewing files on the browser via a Java applet running. Therefore any cached content would be in the Java runtime, not the browser. I don't have an answer or a way to view these text files that were displayed inside a JRE unfortunately—but that was how I read it.

-Stephen, San Diego, CA

3-D on the Big Screen

[Regarding the October 8 EdgeWord: Who Needs 3-D TV? column:]

*Avatar* on the big screen was fantastic. Watched the Owl movie in 3-D. Half or more seemed to look as if it were a flat screen. Seems that 3-D doesn't fit all movies.

-Wm Tiep, Toledo, OH

Internet Telephony

[Regarding James Hartnett's October 1 article, "Place a Call to the Future":]

Does a very good job of identifying what each service does.

-Richard Hardy, La Jolla, CA

The Netflix Label: An Excellent Overview

[Regarding Jack Dunning's August 20 article, "The Netflix Label on the Box":]

This would be an article that is easy to get bogged down in details. Instead you stayed on a high level and gave plenty of key words to search Google with.

Very well done and thanks.

-Brian, Central Point, OR

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*ComputerEdge* always wants to hear from you, our readers. If you have specific comments about one of our articles, please click the "Tell us what you think about this article!" link at the top or bottom of the article/column. Your comments will be attached to the column and may appear at a later time in the "Editor's Letters" section.

If you want to submit a short "ComputerQuick Review", or yell at us, please e-mail us at [ceeditor@computoredge.com](mailto:ceeditor@computoredge.com).

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